CLASSIC POP
PRESENTS

1986

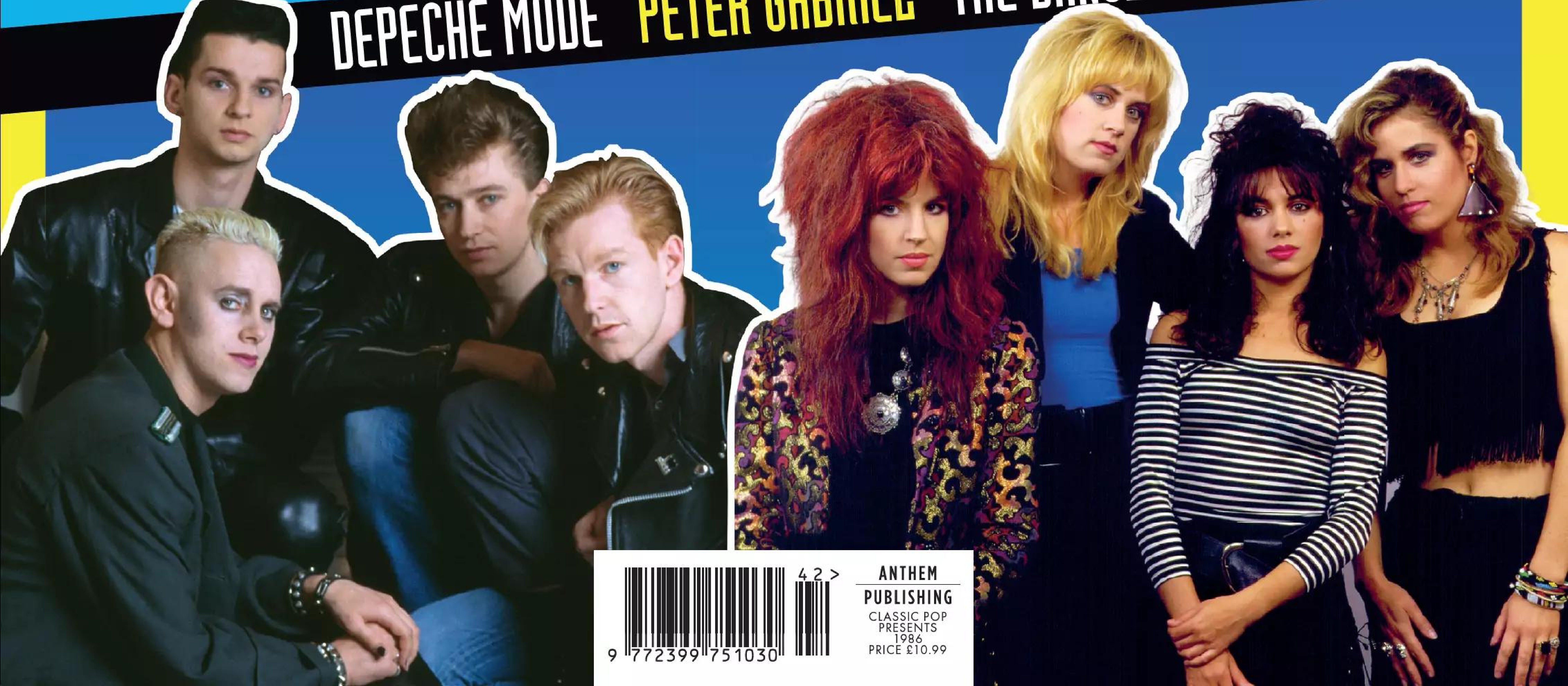
40 YEARS ON!

PET SHOP BOYS **CYNDI LAUPER** JANET JACKSON **MADONNA** THE SMITHS

POP STRIKES AGAIN!

SUPERSTARS, GUITARS AND GOTH IN A TRANSFORMATIVE YEAR FOR MUSIC

DEPECHE MODE **PETER GABRIEL** THE BANGLES **NEW ORDER**



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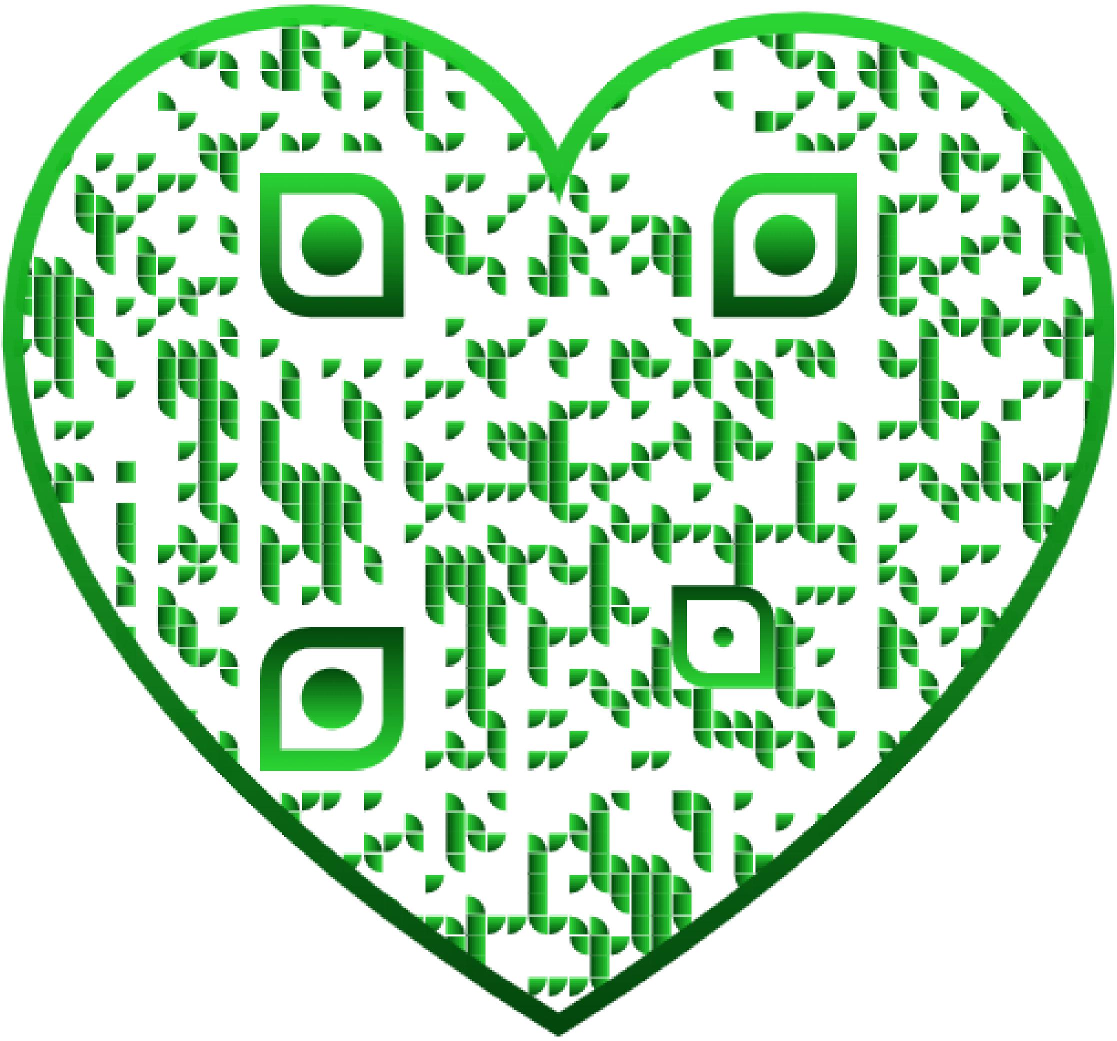

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PART ONE
NOW 12″ 80s 1982
PART TWO
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CLASSIC POP

WELCOME

1986 was an eventful year on planet Earth, both hopeful and horrendous in equal measure. And, as ever, the world of music responded to everything that surrounded it.

At home, youth unemployment had passed the one million mark under the much-maligned Iron Lady, a level not seen in a quarter of a century. The UK's artists made their feelings known, and Billy Bragg, Paul Weller and Jimmy Somerville took to the road with the likes of Madness, The The, Prefab Sprout and Heaven 17 in unified protest.

Meanwhile, the AIDS epidemic was at a worrying high and continuing to spread globally. A mounting wave of fear and stigma was met with powerful musical statements and bold anthems of hope and support.

Things went haywire globally. In January, the Space Shuttle Challenger broke up on launch in front of millions tuned in to their TVs. As Haley's comet made its closest fly-by, New York City passed its first lesbian and gay rights legislation. One month on, Chernobyl's reactor exploded, spewing deadly radioactive material across Europe, the worst nuclear accident in the entirety of human history.

And with the arrival of the Hollywood heroics that would make *Top Gun* the year's highest-grossing film worldwide, anti-apartheid activists were put behind bars in South Africa, as millions of Black South Africans observed a general strike. Following Europe's lead, the UK imposed sanctions, while the US Congress passed its Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act. In music world, Artists Against Apartheid was set up in '86 with concerts featuring headline stars including Peter Gabriel, The Pogues and Elvis Costello. For his part, Paul Simon enlisted a cast of South African musicians to record his controversial album *Graceland*, while John Lydon yelled out his thoughts on segregation with PiL's uncompromising hit single, *Rise*.

It's little wonder that plenty of the year's releases arrived with undercurrents of frustration, fear and anger, often cleverly veiled beneath the brightest of pop melodies. But as with any darkened days, music also provided much-needed respite and escapism from the gloom. And in 1986 plenty of mood-lifting records came around to raise the spirits of weary souls.

It was a year that yielded a diverse mix: fascinating, fun, and often hugely compelling. While pop's major stars vied to remain relevant, in the year that the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame held its first induction to honour the stars of rock'n'roll past, a new generation of artists were making their own bids for stardom.

Inside this edition, we revisit the finest musical moments of the year, via its classic albums, unforgettable singles, big events and major faces. And it's one highly eventful journey…

Enjoy the issue!

Rik

Rik Flynn, Editor

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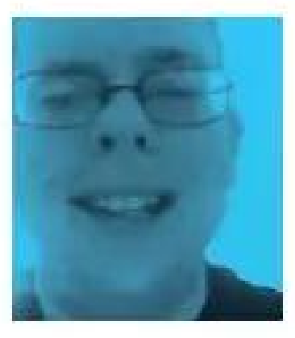
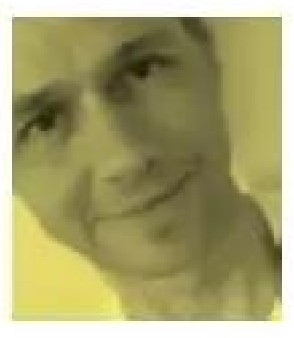
THE CONTRIBUTORS ▶▶



▶John Earls has spent an inordinate amount of time casting his critical eye over the full spectrum of pop. In this special edition of *Classic Pop*, he tells the full story of 1986, from Five Star and Janet Jackson to Duran Duran and Spandau Ballet.

▶Steve O'Brien has written for *SFX*, *The New Statesman*, *The Guardian*, *Digital Spy* and *Radio Times* among many others. Inside, he revisits both The Smiths' seminal *The Queen Is Dead* LP, and Pet Shop Boy's debut album *Please*.

▶Andy Jones has been writing about synthesizer music for possibly longer than the instrument has been around including helming *Music Tech* mag. Here, he takes a deep dive into the year's biggest seller, Madonna's *True Blue*.



▶Mark Lindores has written for *Mixmag*, *Vogue*, *Total Film*, *Attitude*, *Clash*, *Metro*, *Notion*, *Classic Pop* and many others. In this issue, he covers a pivotal year for Depeche Mode, Duran's *Notorious* and Eurythmics' *Revenge*.

▶Felix Rowe has written for various publications including *Louder*, *Clash*, *DIY*, *Long Live Vinyl*, as well as being a *Classic Pop* regular. Here, he looks at a-ha's *Scoundrel Days*, as well as revisiting Paul Simon's celebrated *Graceland* album.

▶ Ian Wade achieved his ambition to write for *Smash Hits* in 1998 and has worked for *The Quietus*, *The Guardian*, *The Sunday Times*, *BBC Music* and *Time Out*. Inside, he takes on New Order's *Brotherhood* and Cyndi Lauper's *True Colors*.

CLASSIC POP PRESENTS 1986

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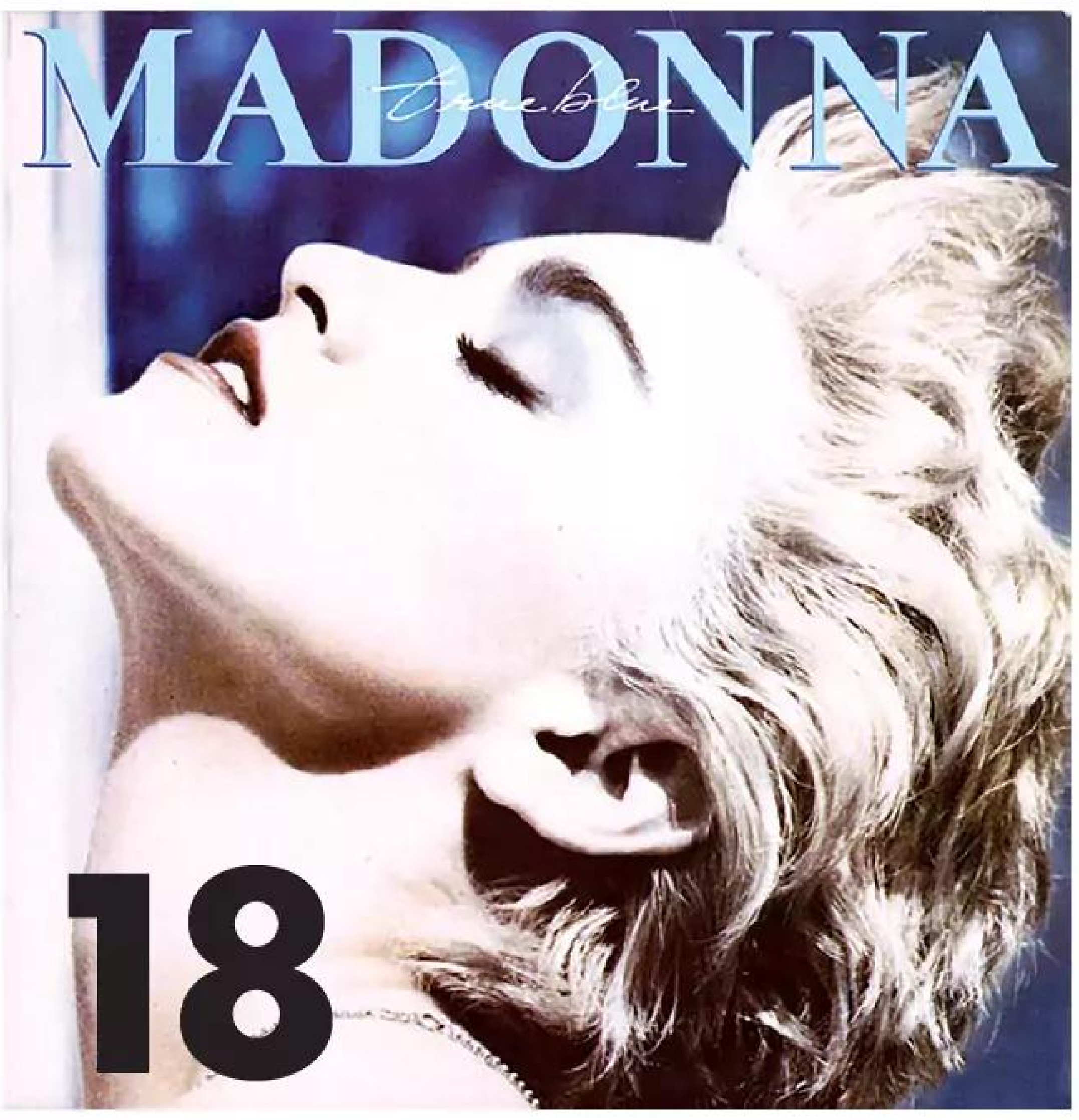

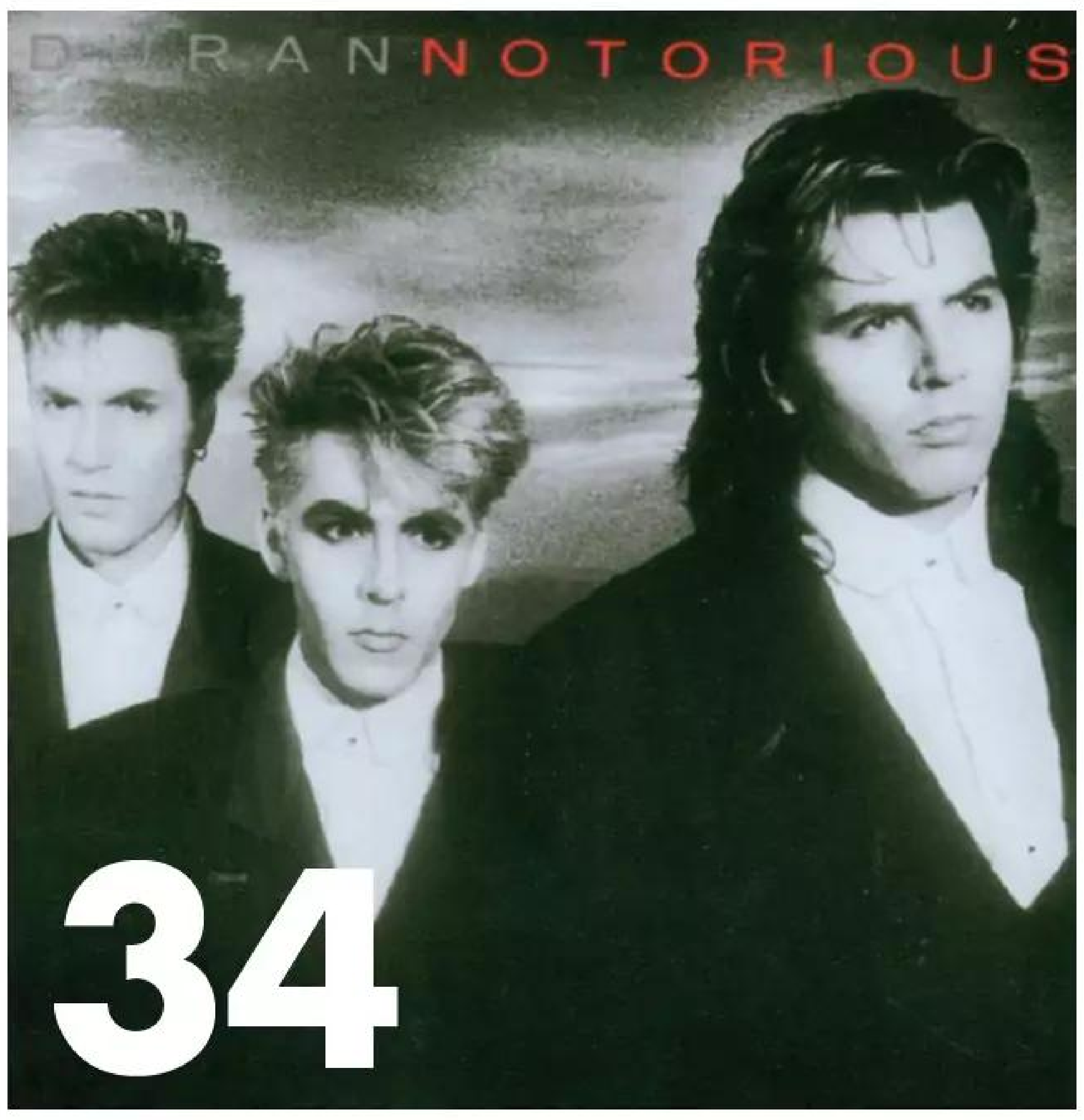

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A 21ST CENTURY TOY
SIGUE SIGUE SPUTNIK
LUXURY DELUX PRODUCTS

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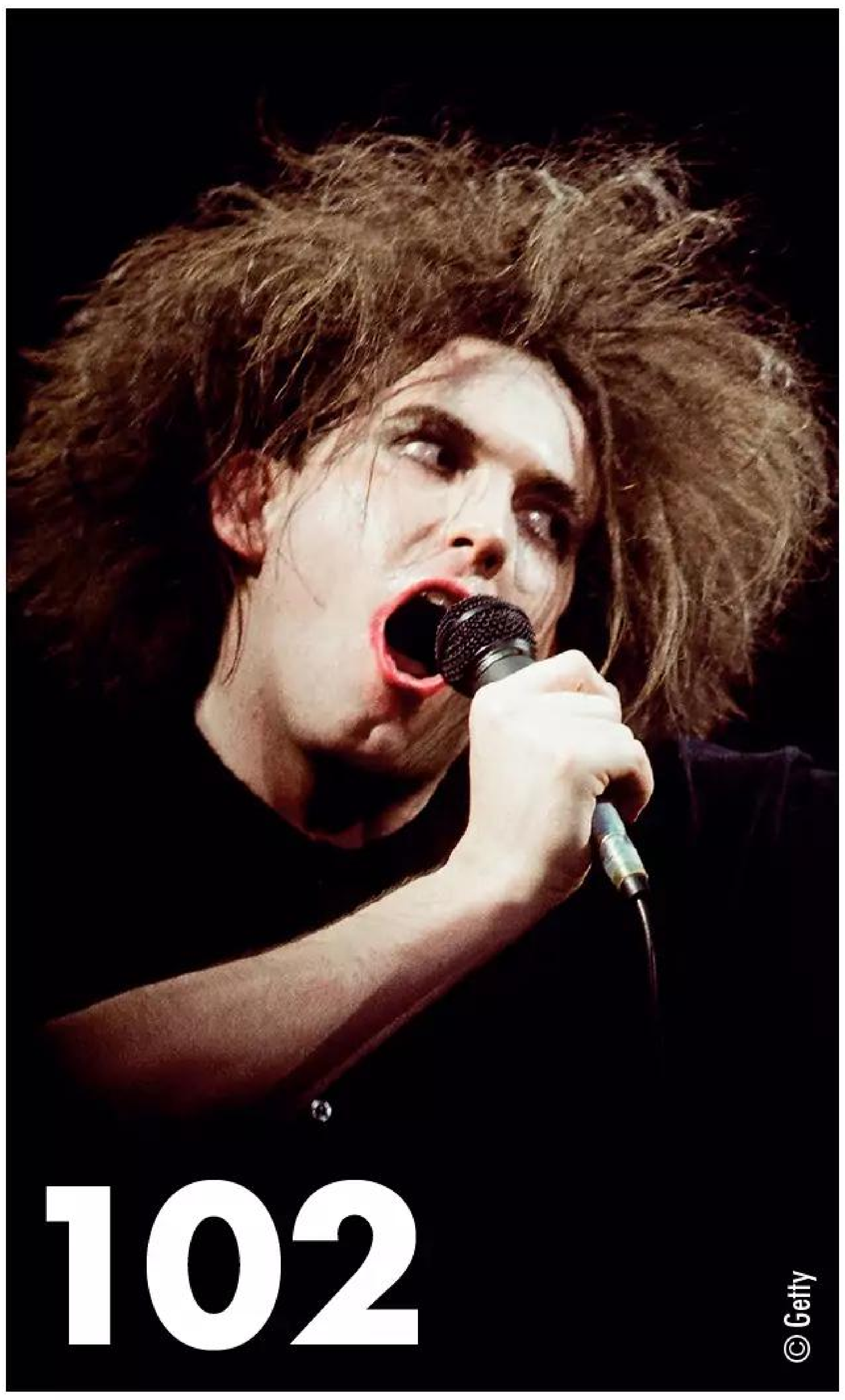

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THE STORY OF 1986

AFTER THE EXPLOSION OF POP WITNESSED IN THE PREVIOUS YEAR, 1986 HAD A HELL OF A LOT TO LIVE UP TO. BUT THANKS TO A DIVERSE MIX OF FRESH TALENT AND AN OLD GUARD REINVIGORATED, IT WOULD DELIVER. FROM MINNEAPOLIS R&B AND DANCE-POP TO SYNTHESIZERS AND HI-NRG, THE WORLD WAS IN FOR A FASCINATING RIDE…

JOHN EARLS

Many people will tell you that 1986 was the decade's worst year for pop: the fallout from Live Aid the year before meant that music changed from championing the colourful and diverse to instead witnessing musicians aiming towards playing stadiums, a uniformity creeping in which has stymied music ever since.

Now, it's true that artists who had dominated the first half of the decade were largely struggling in 1986. Yet this was largely due to the inevitable ageing process, rather than because synthesizers and flamboyance were no longer allowed legroom in the Top 40.

A cursory glance at what topped the chart in Britain and the States shows the truth: in 1986, absolutely anyone could still get to No.1, for good and bad. If there are perhaps relatively few classic albums that year, then 1986's singles confirms this is a year in flux. Nobody knew what was coming next, least of all music's megastars.

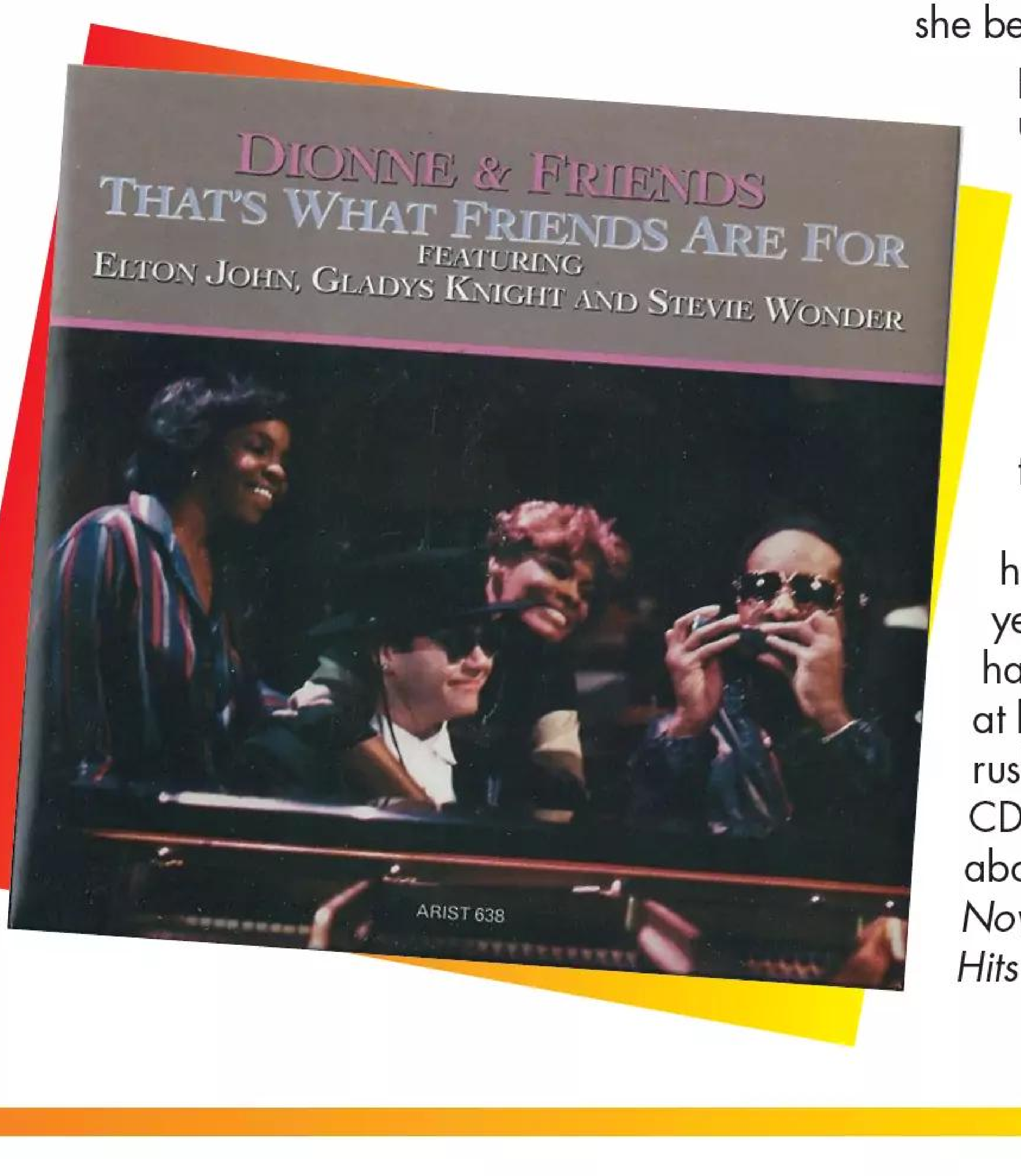
Everything was so up in the air that, in the States, just one single stayed at No.1 for four weeks or more. American readers might remember it, but if you're British you'd have to be a hell of a music quiz expert to have recalled Dionne And Friends' *That's What Friends Are For* without googling: it only reached No.16 in the UK.

Dionne Warwick's collaboration with Elton John, Gladys Knight and Stevie Wonder is exactly the sort of schmaltzy charity single that gives the mid-80s a bad name. Nobody is going to any of those four singers' concerts and yelling: "Play *That's What Friends Are For*!" (Although they did all perform it together at an Aids benefit in New York in 2011.)

Yet even this seemingly stereotypical gloop has its upsides. Firstly, it marked a heartwarming reconciliation between Warwick and Burt Bacharach. Warwick had felt shunned by the songwriting giant in the fallout of Bacharach's partnership with Hal David dissolving a decade earlier.

First recorded by Rod Stewart in 1982 – and, yes, Stewart's 80s output generally deserves to be politely shunned at best – *That's What Friends Are For* was written by Bacharach and his wife Carole Bayer Sager, probably best known for penning Carly Simon's *Nobody Does It Better* and *Arthur's Theme* for Christopher Cross.

Warwick seemed genuinely moved to have reconciled with Bacharach, while the cause *That's What Friends Are For* raised money for was the most important aspect of the song. In 1986, Aids was still largely viewed as the fault of gay people, especially in the US under Ronald Reagan's conservative Presidency. Although the period is often associated with charity singles, *That's What Friends Are For* was the only fundraising No.1 in the States in 1986. And in raising funds for Aids research, it's a song that helped change attitudes towards the disease, so fair enough if it's not musically a classic.


DIONNE & FRIENDS
THAT'S WHAT FRIENDS ARE FOR
FEATURING
ELTON JOHN, GLADYS KNIGHT AND STEVIE WONDER
ARIST 638

That's What Friends Are For was the biggest-selling single in the States in 1986. The most successful album there was from Warwick's cousin, Whitney Houston. (Whitney's mother Cissy was the younger sister of Dionne's mum, Lee.)

Whitney's self-titled debut had been released in February 1985, but didn't really fly until the following year, when she became a proper word-of-mouth phenomenon. The album took up residency at No.1 in the US for 14 weeks in 1986, for seven weeks each either side of a more traditional unit-shifter in the latest from Van Halen, *5150*. Both *How Will I Know* and *Greatest Love Of All* also topped the singles chart in the US.

Britain's biggest album of 1986 had also been released the previous year: Dire Straits' *Brothers In Arms* had 10 weeks at No.1 in the UK, at least in part as so many people rushed out to buy these fancy new CD players they'd heard so much about. Add in No.1s for five different *Now That's What I Call Music* and *Hits* compilations over here, and the

Five Star scored five UK Top 10 hits in 1986, while their second album *Silk & Steel* went to No.1

© Getty

soundtracks to *Miami Vice* and *Top Gun* in the US, and the opportunities for new albums to get the top spot seemed dispiritingly limited.

Additionally, compilation albums from Bryan Ferry and The Police made No.1 in Britain, though at least The Police's first hits compilation – *Every Breath You Take: The Singles* – included the trio's final recording. *Don't Stand So Close To Me '86* was the ho-hum result of The Police initially intending to record a new album, only for Stewart Copeland to break his collarbone after falling off a horse.

It's an injury that epitomised how genteel The Police had become by '86. The toxic atmosphere of recording *Synchronicity* two years earlier hadn't gone away. Copeland's injury meant they were unable to jam any fresh ideas out, with a "Will this do?" idea to re-record two old hits instead eventually settled on. Even then, they couldn't agree which synths to use. Copeland did his drum parts via a Fairlight, while Sting used a Synclavier for the rest, despite the band's engineer being unable to get to grips with Synclavier's software.

It's little wonder the new version of *Don't Stand So Close To Me* is mostly forgotten, while the other re-recording, of *De Do Do Do, De Da Da Da*, was scrapped entirely, finally getting released on reissues of the singles compilation a decade later. It's not worth the wait.

Of the new albums that did reach No.1 in 1986, many are by hoary old veterans,

> *NASTY* AND *WHAT HAVE YOU DONE FOR ME LATELY* COULD EASILY BE RELEASED TODAY, BEATS AND LYRICS STILL ON POINT

STAR
5
Silk & Steel
INCLUDES THE SINGLES

or from hoary young rockers trying to repeat the veterans' tropes. Paul Simon, Queen and both Genesis *and* Peter Gabriel had No.1s in Britain, while the States had Mr Mister and Boston.

What all that overlooks is how 1986 was a good year for Black music. As well as Whitney Houston, No.1 albums in the States included Lionel Richie, Patti LaBelle, Sade and Janet Jackson, whose *Control* was a mighty step up from her *Dream Street* LP two years earlier.

Dream Street was mostly produced by Giorgio Moroder, yet it includes a duet with Cliff Richard, *Two To The Power Of Love* a nadir for both singers. As its title implies, *Control* saw Jackson totally overhauling her career, having split from her husband James DeBarge and walking away from the Jackson family's stewardship.

Enter instead Jam & Lewis as collaborators. *Nasty* and *What Have You Done For Me Lately* could easily be released today, beats and lyrics still totally on point. You can't imagine Cliff Richard singing a verse on *When I Think Of You*.

If Janet Jackson had emerged from musical family royalty, the only new stars to net a No.1 album in Britain in 1986 were out to set up a familial dynasty all of their own. Buster Pearson was a successful session guitarist, playing with Jimmy Cliff, Otis Redding and Wilson Pickett. His domineering attitude towards his children in Five Star was the pushy showbiz parent writ large, yet Deniece Pearson insists it was done for the right reasons: to help Five Star get the best sound possible and to battle against record companies who didn't really understand a pop style still new to the UK.

You can see Deniece's point. It wasn't necessarily clear at the time, but Buster's determination to land top session

THE FINAL JUSTICE

FAREWELL WHAM
GEORGE ANDREW

© Getty

After Live Aid, stadium rock started to become more entrenched as a genre. Yet the most important concert at Wembley was also the stadium's first major show there from a pop artist.

Wham!'s farewell on 28 June, just three months after their split was announced, was a mighty statement to go out on. *The Final* saw Elton John dressed as Ronald McDonald to perform *Candle In The Wind*, and a pink mohican for the closing *I'm Your Man*, in which Simon Le Bon also wandered on for seemingly no good reason.

It was chaos, it was anarchy, it was absolutely Wham!, down to Pepsi & Shirlie's oversized wigs in *Bad Boys*.

Sadly, *The Final* has never been repeated and it seems unlikely to ever get released. Andrew Ridgeley told *The Belfast Telegraph* in 2019 that the concert hadn't been recorded or filmed to broadcast standard: there *are* sound desk recordings of the gig, but Ridgeley said George Michael felt: "It wasn't of the quality he would be prepared to be made public."

There are of course no Wham! live albums at all out there as yet, though rumours persist that a live document of the Whamamerica! tour is on the agenda one day…

Bananarama at the British Pop Awards, staged in London in February 1986

© Getty

SILK & STEEL HAS AGED BETTER THAN MOST ALBUMS OF THE ERA – A UNIVERSAL GROOVE THAT HELPED THE PEARSONS FLY IN AMERICA

players like Paul Jackson Jr and Greg Phillinganes for Five Star helped ensure that *Silk & Steel* has aged better than most albums of the era. There's a classic smoothness to the playing guiding *The Slightest Touch* and *Can't Wait Another Minute*, a universal groove that also helped the Pearsons fly in America.

It should also be noted that a lot of the media coverage around the Pearson family – especially the colonial "Stay in your lane" sneering aimed at the family's mansion in Surrey – appeared to arise from dubious motives that were suspect at the time, let alone how the coverage reads 40 years later. Five Star were the first Black British artists to win Best Group at the Brits, which is possibly more significant than how many Bentleys they owned.

Even before the five Pearson children were old enough to get fully

BANANARAMA
VENUS

settled into the studio together, Deniece and Steadman had sung together in clubs. Their main claim to fame had been supporting the only Black singer to scoop a No.1 single in both Britain and the US in 1986: Buster Pearson's friend, Billy Ocean.

That Ocean topped the charts with different singles on either side of the Atlantic in 1986 was even more impressive: *When The Going Gets Tough, The Tough Get Going* over here and *There'll Be Sad Songs (To Make You Cry)* over there. Considering *Caribbean Queen* and *Get Outta My Dreams, Get Into My Car* also made No.1 in the US, it's strange that Ocean isn't more celebrated, but 1986 was undeniably massive for a man more modest than his talents deserve.

Although Ocean soon quit at his height for a couple of decades to help raise his children, there were fewer more reliable beacons of quality in the charts during the turbulent mid-80s.

Ocean's divergence in his most successful singles in the UK and US hinted at an intriguing aspect of the States' charts: there were several huge British acts who did even better in the US in 1986 than they did here.

Bananarama have never had a No.1 single in Britain, a statistic for which the public should look extremely hangdog indeed. At least the US had the right idea, propelling *Venus* to the top in September. Uniquely, this made for *Venus*' third appearance at the top of the US charts: Shocking Blue's original got to the top in 1970, and *Venus* was also part of Stars On 45's eponymous first medley, from 1981.

The fact Bananarama producers Jolley & Swain refused to work on *Venus*, insisting it wouldn't make for a good dance song, even though the Nanas had done a good job of doing just that in concert for ages, is a rare black mark against the duo. Even Stock Aitken Waterman were initially unconvinced, until the trio assured them *Venus* could work if done in the same style as *You Spin Me Round*.

At least Bananarama aren't one-hit wonders Stateside, where *Cruel Summer* and *I Heard A Rumour* also made the Top 10. The same is true of The Human League. *(Keep Feeling) Fascination* had reached No.8 in the States in 1983, but Philip Oakey was typically wry when discussing what he saw as the League's status as American two-hit wonders with *Classic Pop* in 2023: *Don't You Want Me* and *Human* are their US chart-toppers.

According to Oakey: "I'm trying to think of where we fit in America. Marc Bolan only had one American hit, and it can feel like that for us too.

WEDGE YOUR BETS

Opening night of the Red Wedge Tour, held at the Manchester Apollo

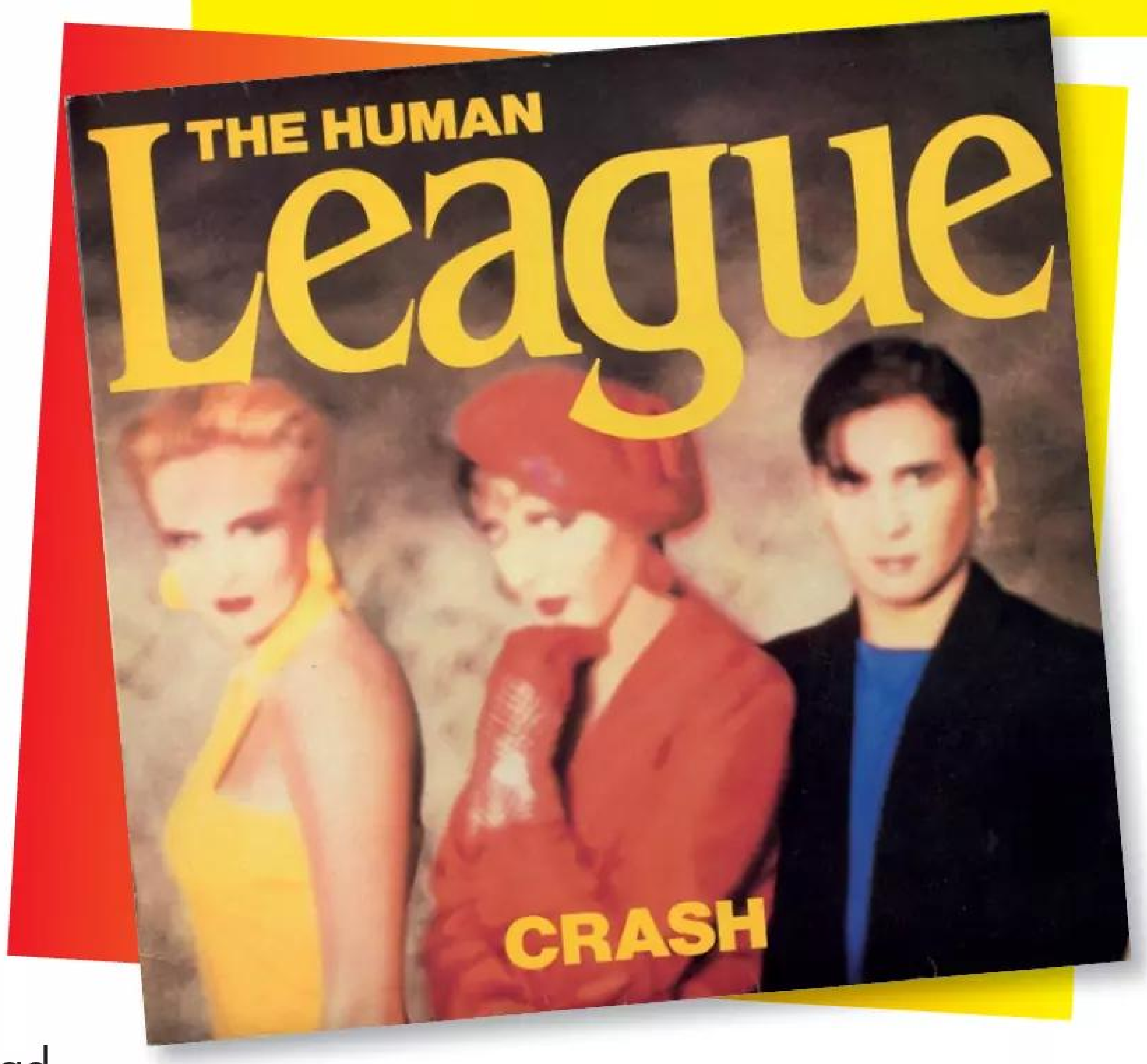
© Getty

Initially set up in November '85, the first Red Wedge tour took place in January 1986. Whatever one's political persuasion, a line-up of The Style Council, Communards, Billy Bragg, Junior, Jerry Dammers and reggae singer Lorna Gee is a pretty good night out.

Guest slots on the tour included Madness, The Smiths, Sade, Bananarama, The Beat, The The, Lloyd Cole, Elvis Costello, The Blow Monkeys and even artists who rarely played live, in Heaven 17 and Prefab Sprout.

Not all left-wing musicians supported the movement. The Housemartins attended a formation meeting, walking out when told the idea of nationalising the music industry wouldn't be supported. The Redskins and Easterhouse similarly felt Red Wedge wasn't truly left-wing.

Once Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government won a third term in 1987, Red Wedge ended. Founding member Billy Bragg was disillusioned at the time, but later said he felt it had been successful in energising young people into supporting Labour. Paul Weller, however, told *Q* in 1996: "It wasn't me at all. I'm not into meetings and being part of somebody's club."



"Places like New York and Los Angeles get us, but sometimes people in America aren't ready for it. And if you're not ready for us, people just look at you and wonder why we're doing what we do: 'Why are they changing costumes? What *is* this?'"

At least *Human* was massive in the States, with Jam & Lewis' chart dominance there like a hipper equivalent of SAW. The former Prince sidemen's exacting methods have long been depicted as tense when they produced The Human League's *Crash* album, but the trio clarified it was their former bandmates who struggled under Jam & Lewis, with the three vocalists coping just fine, as Oakey explained: "Jimmy and Terry were brilliant with the singers, but ruthless with the musicians."

Four other British songs reached No.1 in the States: *Sledgehammer*, *Invisible Touch*, *Addicted To Love…* and *West End Girls*. That Pet Shop Boys broke through internationally in 1986 should instantly negate the year's pariah status.

The first new British No.1 of 1986 after replacing Shakin' Stevens' *Merry Christmas Everyone* in January, *West End Girls* crossed over to the States to repeat its chart-topping status in May. By then, the duo were already worried their success might only be fleeting, as *Love Comes Quickly* had stalled at No.19 in March.

Discussing their fate to *Classic Pop* in 2022 for their singles compilation *Smash*, Neil Tennant recalled: "*West End Girls*

Spandau Ballet's Tony Hadley in full flow at Belgium's Diamond Awards festival in December 1986

© Getty

isn't really like anything else we've ever done. It's actually a classic one-hit-wonder record, because it's like nothing else. I thought Pet Shop Boys were very likely going to be one-hit-wonders." Referring to *Love Comes Quickly*, Chris Lowe admitted: "I thought we were going to be classic one-and-a-half hit wonders, which is even worse."

Tennant added: "We were on a classic trajectory. Our first single: No.1 everywhere around the world. Next single: No.19. Now, the logical trajectory is that the next record goes to No.29, the one after doesn't make the Top 50, and then you're dropped."

Fortunately, Pet Shop Boys had already written *Suburbia*, a single the duo consider one of their most important for reviving their fortunes and at least giving them a chance at longevity, after it returned them to the Top 10 (at No.8) in October. It's fair to say the rest of debut album *Please* wasn't bad either.

Indebted to dance music, Pet Shop Boys were also keen students of what was happening in the nascent house scene in the States. Part of the justified criticism of 1986 is that the mainstream had a lack of good dance music to champion – but it was getting there, as highlighted in documentary maker Phil Ranstrom's acclaimed short film, *House Music In Chicago*.

Ranstrom had previously made films on cocaine smuggling and the Jesus People cult. Ranstrom brought that same detail to his film of Frankie Knuckles and JM Silk (aka Steve Silk Hurley) playing at Chicago's famed Powerhouse club.

Spandau Ballet Through The Barricades

NOTORIOUS IS UNDERSTANDABLY PATCHY, YET IN THE TITLE TRACK AND *SKIN TRADE* IT'S GOT TWO OF DURAN'S FINEST MOMENTS

JM Silk's cover of Isaac Hayes' move into disco on 1975's *I Can't Turn Around* was a club favourite, to which his housemate (no, really) Keith Farley added new lyrics. Farley "Jackmaster" Funk's *Love Can't Turn Around* reached UK No.10 in September. Throw in Darryl Pandy's giddying performance on *TOTP* and it was clear something more exciting than Chris De Burgh's *The Lady In Red* was going on.

Rather than seethe with jealousy at Farley's success, Steve Silk Hurley promptly released *Jack Your Body*. It took until January 1987 to reach UK No 1, But Hurley became part of house's mainstream explosion, soon leading to Britain's own rave revolution. Meanwhile, Knuckles, already a decade into his DJ career, finally released his own debut single in 1986. A drum machine cover of Teddy Pendergrass' R&B staple, *You Can't Hide From Yourself* remains a favourite for house heads.

The biggest band in the world the year before, Duran Duran had much to prove by 1986: two Taylors down after Roger and Andy scarpered post-Live Aid, Nile Rodgers *really* earned his coin as a producer for keeping the remaining trio buoyant. *Notorious* is understandably patchy, yet in the title track and *Skin Trade* it's got two of Duran's finest moments, and *Vertigo (Do The Demolition)* is one of Simon Le Bon's most direct, straightforward lyrics on the popstar life.

In the London corner, *Spandau Ballet* released a song both Tony Hadley and Gary Kemp agree is their finest. Written after their merch seller Kidso Reilly was shot in the back in Belfast by a soldier eventually convicted of murder, *Through The Barricades* saw all of Spandau in magnificent form. Had it been penned by someone more readily associated with protest songs, it's likely *Through The Barricades* would be more generally regarded a masterpiece. The band knew instantly it was something special, Hadley recently telling *CP* how he had to demand everyone leave the studio as they were putting too much pressure on him not to mess up the vocals of such an important song.

So there are plenty of options in fighting against claims that 1986 is somehow letting the side down in the decade's overall greatness. Yes, *Every Loser Wins*, *The Chicken Song* and *I Want To Wake Up With You* are rotten No.1 singles. At least they demonstrate the breadth of who could top the charts in the mid-80s: a lovers' rock veteran like 43-year-old Boris Gardiner having his second hit, 16 years on from *Elizabethan Reggae*, is faintly heroic.

And 1986 is also the year of equally unlikely No.1s such as *Rock Me Amadeus*, *Spirit In The Sky*, *The Final Countdown* and *Take My Breath Away*. If you need further proof on how mighty a year it was, just consider the UK's biggest-selling single: Communards' *Don't Leave Me This Way*. The public being fully on board with a song that defiant in that political climate? Yes please. ■

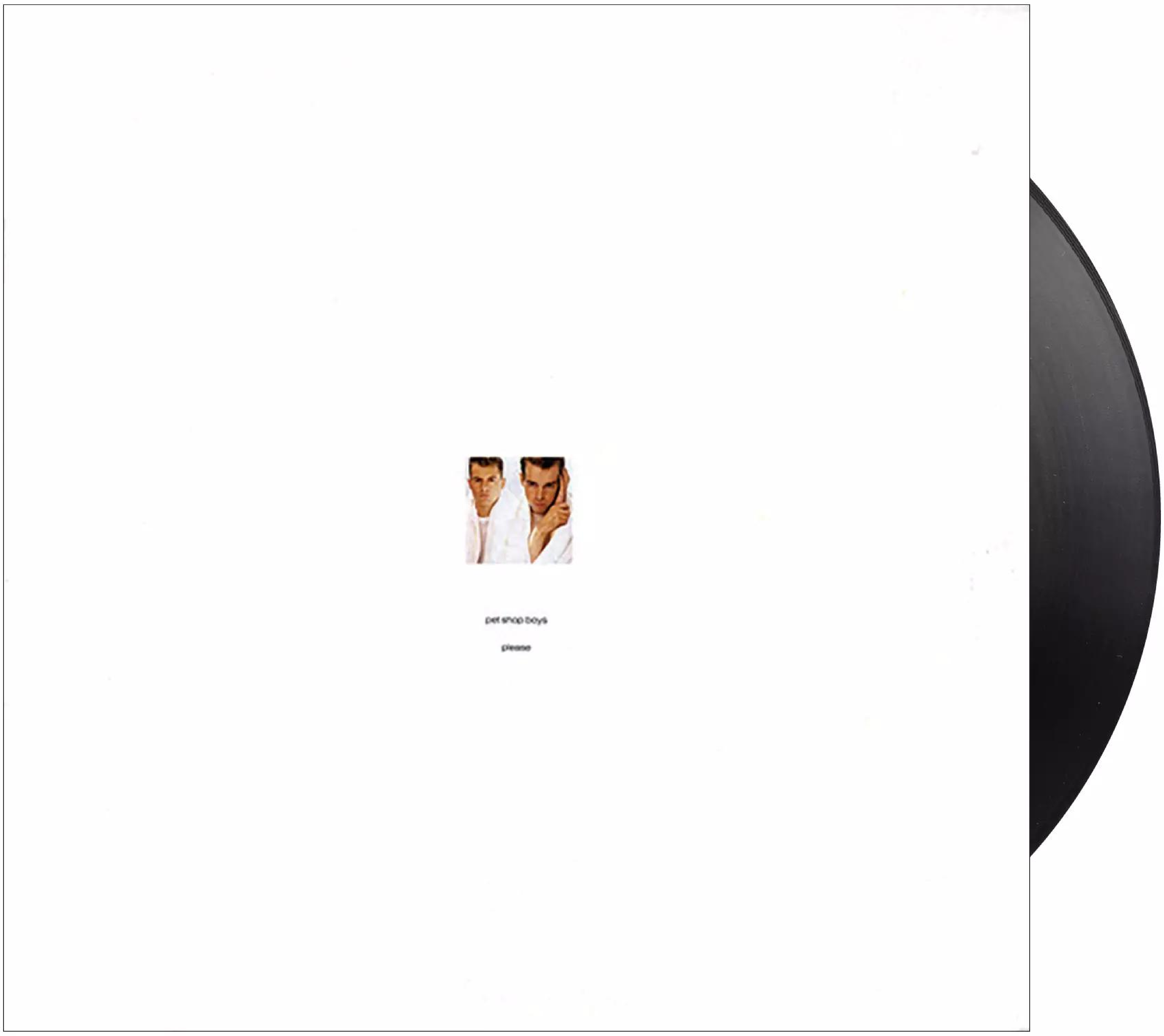
QUEEN ABDICATING

QUEEN
A Kind of Magic

A year after Live Aid had reenergised their career, Queen began what would prove their final tour with Freddie Mercury, coinciding with new album, *A Kind Of Magic*.

Despite the post-Live Aid triumph, the album only lasted a single week at No.1 in the UK and reached No.46 in the States. Critics largely dismissed it, *People* magazine stating: "There's hardly a personal expression, let alone an intimate one, in this album," and *Kerrang!* feeling it had been written by committee. Only the title track, *One Vision* and *Who Wants To Live Forever* lasted past its initial release.

The accompanying Magic Tour was another matter, of course. It included concerts in Newcastle, London and Manchester, ending at Knebworth on August 9. The support artists for the UK leg make for interesting reading: Status Quo are the one constant, with Big Country, INXS and Belouis Some also featuring. Opening in Newcastle was Zeno – a band fronted by German guitarist Zeno Roth, whose self-titled debut of 1986 failed to chart. The blues act later reformed more successfully for a series of albums from the mid-90s.



CLASSIC ALBUM

PLEASE
PET SHOP BOYS

WITH A FRESH RECORD DEAL AND AN EXPERIENCED PAIR OF EARS BEHIND THE DESK, PET SHOP BOYS' DEBUT WOULD PROVE ONE OF THE DEFINING RECORDS OF 1986

STEVE O'BRIEN

Had Neil Tennant and Chris Lowe not been so bloody minded at the end of 1985, their debut album might have sounded very different to the one we know. Earlier that year *You Spin Me Round (Like A Record)* by Dead Or Alive had become a sensation and Parlophone believed this was the sound that was right for their newest signing's first album. Yes, the label that had guided The Beatles' ascent wanted Stock Aitken Waterman behind the desk for Pet Shop Boys' debut LP. Thankfully, Tennant and Lowe had other ideas and were looking across the Atlantic for their man…

Stephen Hague was an American who had been a member of the power-pop outfit Jules And The Polar Bears before moving into production, masterminding such game-changing records as the Rock Steady Crew's *(Hey You) The Rock Steady Crew* and Malcolm McLaren's *Madam Butterfly*. Tennant's head was turned by the producer's hip-hop sensibilities and boldness in the studio.

Hague's first job was to re-do *West End Girls*. First put out in 1984 and produced by Bobby Orlando, that version had stiffed commercially, but Tennant and Lowe believed passionately in the song and Hague was tasked with giving it a chart-friendly facelift. As the producer reflected to *Magnet* magazine about the original: "There were some good parts there, but it also sounded to me a bit like a

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THE SONGS ▶▶

① TWO DIVIDED BY ZERO

A song originally co-composed by Bobby O, *Two Divided By Zero* was inspired by a talking calculator that Tennant had bought for his father one Christmas. Though it's generally seen as a fantastic opener, it does, however, incur the wrath of more mathematically-inclined Pet Shop Boys fans because, as any number-smith will tell you, it's impossible to divide by zero. So there.

② WEST END GIRLS

Tennant and Lowe's signature number. Inspired by a James Cagney film and TS Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Lowe's brooding bassline and Tennant's wonderfully droll vocal created a masterpiece, a dance number that has an intoxicating sense of menace about it. Explaining the influence of Eliot's epic poem on the song, Tennant told Smooth Radio: "What I like about it is, it's the different voices, almost a sort of collage. All the different voices and languages coming in and I've always found that very powerful. So on *West End Girls* it's different voices. The line 'Just you wait till I get you home' is a direct quotation."

③ OPPORTUNITIES (LET'S MAKE LOTS OF MONEY)

A satirical jab at 80s yuppies and opportunistic scheming, this re-recorded single would just miss the UK Top 10. As Tennant told *Mojo* in 2013: "It's a simple message isn't it? 'I've got the brains, you've got the looks, let's make lots of money.' A very insensitive thing that was meant to be a satire of Thatcherism. Actually, we'd written the Thatcherite anthem. But it's very difficult to think, now, that there was a period before money culture… It was that period where suddenly one's sensitive left-wing soul was shocked by everything being about money. Now, of course, generations have grown that haven't known anything else."

④ LOVE COMES QUICKLY

The album's second single, one that hit No.19 on the UK hit parade, is the only track from *Please* where Stephen Hague is credited as co-writer, with the producer having supplied its middle-eight section. On its release, Tennant described the song to *Smash Hits*: "It's very angst-ridden. It's about falling in love. We wrote it about a year ago when Chris used to come down from Liverpool at the weekends and we'd go to a friend's studio in Camden Town every Saturday night. I just started singing *Love Comes Quickly* and it all just came into my head. I think the best songs are like that – they come into your head at one go."

⑤ SUBURBIA

An explosive evocation of youthful rebellion and suburban ennui, drawing from Penelope Spheeris' 1983 film of the same name. The fourth and final single from *Please*, it hit No.8 towards the end of '86. The version on the album was the last number completed for the album, but due to time constraints, it's simply a spruced-up demo. When it was released as a single, the song was reworked with producer Julian Mendelsohn.

⑥ TONIGHT IS FOREVER

According to PSB's Geowayne page, the duo had considered releasing *Tonight Is Forever* as the follow-up to *West End Girls*, but when a live TV performance of the song didn't turn out as well as they hoped, they decided against it. A pity, as it's an album highlight, and was clearly highly regarded by Liza Minnelli who covered it on her 1989 Pet Shop Boys-produced album, *Results*.

⑦ VIOLENCE

Chris Lowe's favourite track off *Please*, and the last number written for the album. The lyrics were inspired, at least in part, by the ongoing troubles in Northern Ireland, but the song is vague enough for it to be about violence in any form. "The son and brother/ When he gets home," Tennant sings, "He gives someone some love and mutters/ 'Woman, you'll never understand I did what I said in self-defence/ With violence'." The song was later re-recorded for a charity concert at the Haçienda nightclub in 1992. Known as the 'Haçienda version' it was released as one of the B-sides to *I Wouldn't Normally Do This Kind Of Thing*.

⑧ I WANT A LOVER

PSB have a number of songs that begin with I Want… (see also *I Want To Wake Up*, *I Want A Dog* and *I Want You Now*), but *I Want A Lover* was their first. Originally penned in 1983, this is a particularly sexually charged song, with Tennant singing: "Driving through the night, it's so exciting/ Turning off the light without another thought tonight…"

⑨ LATER TONIGHT

A song recorded live in the studio, it was, as Neil told journalist John Gill, "The most gay song we've ever written, practically, and no one noticed at the time. The song is saying that the boy is so out of your reach you will never meet him… but then, you wait 'til later. Maybe it's destiny, or fate, because tonight always comes. So it may happen. Really it's about sex and class."

⑩ WHY DON'T WE LIVE TOGETHER?

Originally recorded earlier in 1985 with Ron Dean Miller and reworked for the album by Hague, *Why Don't We Live Together?* is a fine album closer. "The song is really about settling down, compromise," Neil told Dead Of Night. "If you will never find someone who you are totally in love with, who you are intellectually compatible with, physically compatible with, never going to get bored with sexually, is incredibly good-looking – if you're not going to find that person, you're probably going to settle for the person whom you're used to. It's the compromise of reaching middle age."

novelty record. One of the most important decisions we made was to slow it down. One thing led to another once we'd done that."

Please is one of those records that didn't simply arrive, it exploded. Nothing else in 1986 sounded like Pet Shop Boys. Within months of the album's release in March, the Stock Aitken Waterman sound was everywhere, from Bananarama's hit single *Venus* to Princess' *I'll Keep On Loving You*, with Mel & Kim's *Showing Out (Get Fresh At The Weekend)* going Top 5 by autumn. Instead of being another pair of artists on PWL's roster, Pet Shop Boys stood out. Their instincts had paid off.

Tennant, Lowe and Hague entered Advision Studios in Fitzrovia, London, in November '85 for the recording of their debut album. The pair settled on 10 songs that would act as a loose narrative. As Chris Heath explained in the booklet that accompanied *Please: Further Listening 1984-1986*: "They run away in the first song (*Two Divided By Zero*), they arrive in the city (*West End Girls*), they want to make money (*Opportunities*), they fall in love (*Love Comes Quickly*), move to suburbia (*Suburbia*), go out clubbing (*Tonight Is Forever*), there's violence in the city (*Violence*) and casual sex (*I Want A Lover*), someone tries to pick up a boy (*Later Tonight*)", with the sequence ending on *Why Don't We Live Together?*

Speaking to *Classic Pop* in 2018, Stephen Hague explained why he was so keen to work with Pet Shop Boys: "I loved electronic music from quite early on," he said, "Morton Subotnick, Tomita, Larry Fast's Synergy records and then Kraftwerk, of course. My background had been guitar, bass and piano, but I was an early adopter of synths. British synth-pop started to become its own category: I suppose I share some of the blame for that!"

Parlophone's confidence in Hague was bolstered by the success of the reimagined *West End Girls*. The label hadn't been keen on re-releasing it, but Tennant and Lowe stood firm and were vindicated by the single hitting No.1 in the January of '86 while the pair were in the studio making what would eventually be named *Please* (so titled because, as the duo said at the time: "It's so people can go into the record shop and say can I have the Pet Shop Boys album, please?")

Yet despite the importance that Hague has in the making of *Please*, the album actually kicks off with a Bobby O co-write. *Two Divided By Zero* had been penned by Tennant, with Bobby Orlando supplying the backing track (the song is notable for being the only PSB song, excluding covers, that doesn't credit Lowe as co-writer). The track on the album is significantly different to the '83 original, with Hague building up the layers to give it a more grandiose sound.

But Hague wasn't just onboard *Please* as a producer. Like Bobby O two years previous, he also had a hand co-writing a song off the album, specifically *Love Comes Quickly*, released as *West End Girls*' follow-up single on 24 February '86. Notice the middle-eight section? That's him.

Apart from *West End Girls* and *Two Divided By Zero*, the other track rejigged for *Please* would be *Opportunities (Let's Make Lots Of Money)*. In its original JJ Jeczalik-helmed form, the pair's third single release (following the first *West End Girls* and *One More Chance*, eventually re-done for second album *Actually*) had crashed at No.116. With re-recorded vocals, it would be put out as the record's third 45, this time nesting at No.11.

It was during the 10-week recording of the album that thoughts turned to the artwork. Image was important to Tennant and Lowe and the cover for their debut wasn't something to be casually okayed. While in the studio, the band's manager Tom Watkins had been teasing them with "this amazing packaging idea", something he called paper engineering. Then one day he arrived at Advision with a mock up, which Lowe described to the Dead Of Night website as "a latticework".

"We looked at it and thought it was ridiculously complicated," added Tennant. "As a result we and Mark Farrow [a designer who worked in Watkins' office] promptly came up with the idea of having a white sleeve with a tiny picture of us." The photo of the pair with white towels draped around them had been taken by Neil's childhood friend Eric Watson. "Eric's never been very happy with it because if you look at it it's not completely in focus," Tennant told the website. "We whacked it on the front cover simply because the towels were white."

Please would be done and dusted by January '86 and was on the shelves just two months later. Parlophone had been excited by the success of *West End Girls* and wanted the pair's debut album out as soon as possible. As Lowe reflected to *Magnet*: "We had to move much more quickly than we might have, but it was all a learning process, as we had never really been in a proper studio before."

THE VIDEOS

WEST END GIRLS
Manager Tom Watkins tasked the team behind *West End Girls*' promo with a London odyssey. Eric Watson and Andy Morahan kicked off at dawn, using compact Video8 gear in spots like Aldgate. They trailed Tennant and Lowe across bustling markets, quiet alleys, and underground passages, ending at Waterloo Station's vast hall.

LOVE COMES QUICKLY
A budget-conscious studio creation, yet Tennant's Gaultier suit suggested something more sophisticated . Sleek visuals mix head-turning models in motion with a persistent lattice overlay, echoing the lyric's grip of romance. Andy Morahan once more handled direction alongside photographer Eric Watson.

OPPORTUNITIES (LET'S MAKE LOTS OF MONEY)
The original video had been inspired by John Huston's southern gothic 1979 film, *Wise Blood*. This new promo would be less threatening, but also less cinematic, with arcade-inspired effects, city silhouettes and drifting skies. Tennant sports a glossy jacket and pale gloves; Lowe, in labourer clothes, cradles a guitar in a rock-hero stance.

SUBURBIA
A jarring shuttle between British estates in Kingston upon Thames and Californian sprawl in Pasadena. The band seized an MTV event to grab American shots, nodding to Penelope Spheeris' cult punk chronicle of the same name. Back home, they lounge in crisp suits on sofas, Tennant wielding insect spray, Lowe brandishing a bat with casual menace.

A young Neil Tennant, fresh from his time on *Smash Hits* magazine

© Getty

“*PLEASE* IS FULL OF LIFE AND JOY AND POSSIBILITY, ABOUT ALL THAT LONDON HELD, AND ALL YOU WERE RUNNING AWAY FROM”

NEIL TENNANT

Talking to the same magazine about the sound the duo wanted for the record, Tennant explained: “Chris and I wanted everything programmed, metronomic, tight and precise. Stephen Hague wanted a bit more air in everything, especially on a song such as *Love Comes Quickly*, which is still one of my favourite songs. Stephen Hague’s heightened bass line started as a mistake initially but just worked to our benefit eventually.”

Hurried or not, *Please* is now regarded as a masterpiece, though critics at the time weren’t universally convinced of the album’s greatness. While Tennant’s old home of *Smash Hits* gave it a 9 out of 10 rating, others weren’t so sure, with *The Village Voice* stating – somewhat sniffily – that “the music’s blandness is part of the quite well-executed concept: articulating the ambivalent romanticism, immodest hopes, and not-so-quiet desperation behind the suburban facade of the people who create *Smash Hits* pop, and maybe consume it, too.” But as the *Los Angeles Times* noted in May ’86, it was partly Tennant’s love of needling critics and also the music press’ aversion to dance music that caused the backlash. “Many critics have been gunning for [*West End Girls*], attacking with their heavy artillery,” they wrote. “Nor have they been very kind to the debut album, *Please* – loaded with disco material of course – that’s nearly in the Top 10 after just one month on the pop chart. The problem is that most critics regard disco (or dance music, as they call it now) as one-dimensional noise pollution.”

But that was then and this is now. Forty years on, music critics are far wiser and more open-minded to dance music’s qualities and Pet Shop Boys are no longer looked down upon, or dismissed as synth-pop lightweights. More recent reviews don’t dare slam it, with AllMusic’s write-up calling it “a collection of immaculately crafted and seamlessly produced synthesized dance-pop” that “sketches out the basic elements of the duo’s sound.”

Reflecting on the album to *Magnet* on its 30th anniversary, Tennant stated that “*Please* is full of life and joy and possibility – even at its bleakest – about all that London held, and all you were running away from.”

The LP would peak at No.3 in the UK and even went Top 10 in the US, their highest-charting album there. Other albums would fare better in their homeland, but *Please* remains many fans’ favourite record. It made stars of Neil Tennant and Chris Lowe and helped make Stephen Hague one of the 80s and 90s’ go-to producers. It was an album in tune with the times (*Opportunities* became an ironic anthem for the Thatcher revolution) and yet it still speaks to us, four decades on. “Even now,” Tennant said in 2016, “I think it sounds classic and contemporary. Unlike say, Depeche Mode, who don’t particularly like their first album because it sounds dated.” ■

MADONNA
true blue

CLASSIC ALBUM

TRUE BLUE

MADONNA

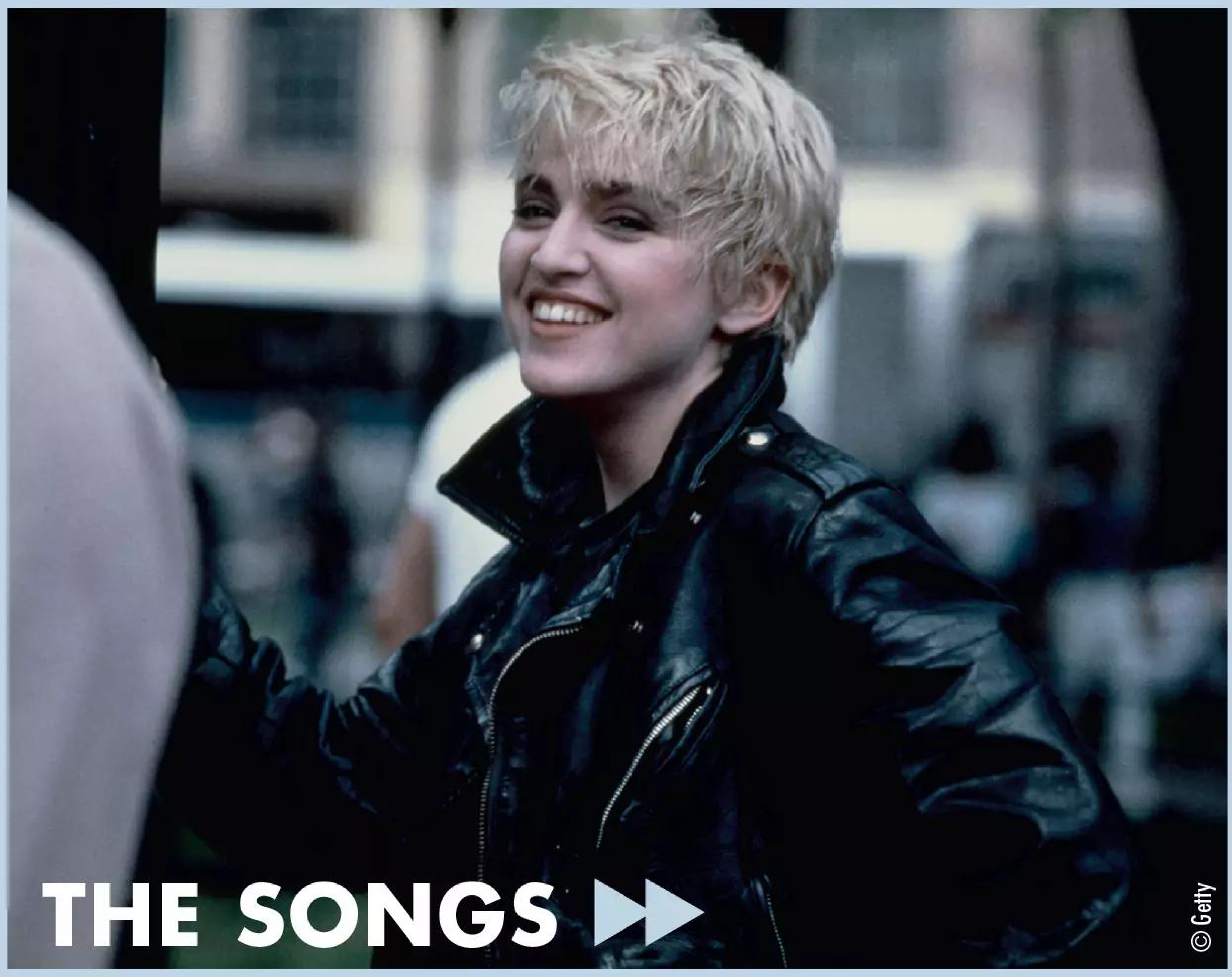
JUST WHEN YOU THOUGHT MADONNA COULDN'T GET ANY MORE SUCCESSFUL, HER THIRD ALBUM BECAME HER BEST-SELLING, TURNED HER INTO A GLOBAL PHENOMENON, AND GAVE US SOME OF THE MOST ICONIC MOMENTS IN POP CULTURE

ANDY JONES

True Blue was Madonna's third album, and if you think that *Like A Virgin* was the record that launched Madonna to the world – which of course it was – then *True Blue* was the one that launched her into the cosmos. It ended up shifting 25 million units – over double the sales of *Like A Virgin* – spawned countless No.1 singles, and had statisticians furiously writing and rewriting record books. This success was down to a little bit of controversy (when isn't it when it comes to Madonna?), some great promo videos, superb production and, of course, great songs.

Aside from Madonna, a lot of *True Blue*'s sound, production and songwriting was down to the team she surrounded herself with during its writing and recording. And while later Madonna albums might well have hinged on whatever producer was in vogue at the time, this wasn't the case with *True Blue*. The target of the album was to ramp up the variety, depth and quality of the songs to attract a wider and perhaps more mature audience, and for that Madonna chose the tried and trusted duo of Pat Leonard and Stephen Bray. Between them, they co-wrote and co-produced pretty much every track on the LP alongside Madonna. And it was a first for her to be involved in both disciplines for *every* track on an album.

Patrick Leonard had been the musical director on Madonna's The Virgin Tour, getting the job after working with the Jackson 5. But he wasn't keen on the role to start with: "Going out on a stage and playing *Like A Virgin* wasn't my idea of a thrill. And it still isn't," he told *Sound On Sound* in 1991. But the tour had its



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THE SONGS ▶▶

① PAPA DON'T PREACH

You could argue that opening *True Blue*'s debut track with a bit of orchestra elegance was a cynical attempt to say that Madonna had moved on from some of the sugary pop from her previous two albums. Well, you could argue that, but then of course, the strings get swept aside by one of the most memorable pop songs of all time, one that beautifully bridges the gaps between albums two and three. With its then controversial lyrics and ridiculously catchy hooks, it's a dream intro for *True Blue*.

② OPEN YOUR HEART

Just when you're taking a quick breath after the pop overload of *Papa Don't Preach, Open Your Heart* keeps up the pace with some ease and really does back up what Peter Bray says of Madonna: "Everything she does is so hooky". If Madonna wanted to show she had the writing chops, then – and we're only on track two, remember – *Open Your Heart* is almost perfect. Yes, hindsight helps us whistle those riffs as they come in, but this is a gloriously constructed piece of pop art. The video's not bad either.

③ WHITE HEAT

White Heat almost definitely suffers as a track three filler song because it's just followed two of the best opening tracks of any album, ever. And while there is a decent song in there, it could be one that sits on a Madge B-side (or a Wham! one, come to that). In fairness, *White Heat* delivers something of a club feel – thanks to Patrick Leonard's synth and beat input – but that actually dates it a little more. Like a cute mongrel dog at Crufts surrounded by pedigrees.

④ LIVE TO TELL

You can certainly understand why Sire Records were "terrified" by *Live To Tell*. The opening single from *True Blue* was Madonna's choice – perhaps with some pressure from then boyfriend Sean Penn to use it as promo for his film *At Close Range* (which was helmed by *True Blue*'s go-to video director James Foley) – but it's not exactly *Like A Virgin*. With its (now) iconic opening, sophisticated backdrop and one of Madonna's best vocals (and if it really is from the original 8-track first take, it shows what a quality singer she is), it sits in many a Madonna Top 5.

⑤ WHERE'S THE PARTY

Picking up the pace somewhat, *Where's The Party* is a delightful and joyous romp of 80s goodness that perhaps reflects the recording of the entire *True Blue* album. It was written and recorded in the studio during the process, so creative was the atmosphere. Madonna's voice is in full flow here too and we're willing to guess she recorded the whole take in about 10 minutes. Genius.

⑥ TRUE BLUE

True Blue is the ultimate 'track six injection' – a common 80s trick to keep you interested in an album if there was too much filler elsewhere (which, of course, there isn't here). The track started life as an ode to the 60s (and Sean Penn) but such was its pop impact it has become one of the biggest songs of the decade – which if nothing else is going to totally confuse music historians of the future.

⑦ LA ISLA BONITA

When you have *La Isla Bonita* on the bench ready to come on as your *fifth* single you must be doing something right. It really shows the depth of songwriting on *True Blue* but also, of course, a totally different musical side to the rest of the album, contributing to the diversity and sophistication that Madonna was looking for. It's also a song that Patrick Leonard presented to Quincy Jones for Michael Jackson's all-conquering *Bad* album.

⑧ JIMMY JIMMY

Certainly one of the happiest cuts on *True Blue* and a refreshing injection of fun with a late-70s/early-80s New Wave vibe (to these ears anyway). With only four songs unreleased as singles from *True Blue*, we wonder if this was ever a contender as it certainly has the hooks and chorus. Six singles from an album though? Probably would have broken a few more records.

⑨ LOVE MAKES THE WORLD GO ROUND

But that all said, *Love Makes The World Go Round* could *also* have been a contender (seven from nine, why not?). It contains more hooks and choruses than it should but manages to meld them together into a joyous closer; although one with a message: "make love not war", "there's hunger everywhere" and "we've got to take a stand". 1986 or 2025?

THE TARGET OF THE ALBUM WAS TO RAMP UP THE VARIETY, DEPTH AND QUALITY OF THE SONGS TO ATTRACT A WIDER AND PERHAPS MORE MATURE AUDIENCE, AND FOR THAT MADONNA CHOSE THE TRIED AND TRUSTED DUO OF PAT LEONARD AND STEPHEN BRAY

benefits, one of which was that he and Madonna had started writing together.

However, the story behind Leonard joining the *True Blue* team is quite extraordinary and one that involves Sean Penn (Madonna's then boyfriend), Quincy Jones and Michael Jackson. And the result? Two of the best tracks on *True Blue*.

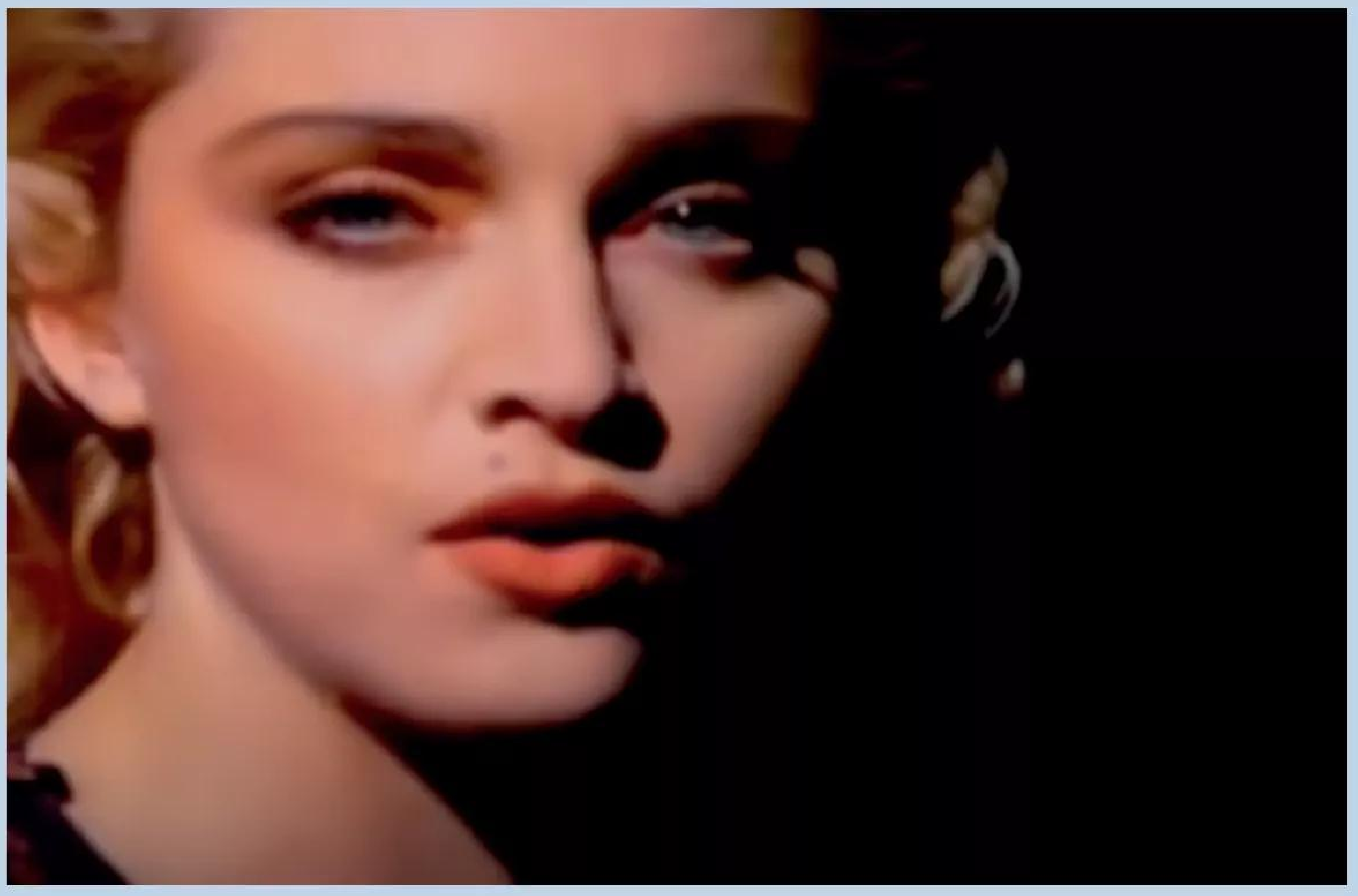
It starts with Leonard trying to break into the soundtrack business, and he was on the brink of doing just that with a song called *Live To Tell*, which had been accepted for the film *Fire With Fire*. The only problem was, it had no lyrics, and so he asked Madonna to write some. While she was on her way over, the film company essentially said 'no' to the track, leaving Leonard in the lurch.

"When she got there," Leonard recalled to *USA Today* in 2021, "I told her [about the rejection] and she said, 'Oh, well, Sean just made a movie so maybe it can be used in his movie.' She sat on the floor with a pad, wrote the lyrics and we recorded it on an 8-track in my house."

It gets even more extraordinary. In an interview Leonard made with Dutch Public TV channel *Top 2000 a gogo*, he reveals that, after recording *Live To Tell* with Madonna, he went to Michael Jackson's house to discuss writing a song for the album *Bad* with both Jackson and Quincy Jones.

"I went to Michael's house and the phone rang and they said Madonna's on the

THE VIDEOS



LIVE TO TELL
A promo for Madonna's debut *True Blue* single or for Sean Penn's film *At Close Range*? With *At Close Range*'s director James Foley in the seat, it's the latter. So much so that it's probably the one video where Madonna has the least screen time, sitting in a dark room – or outside (there's wind in her hair but it's so dark, we can't tell) – while the camera spins around her. The rest of it is basically one long trailer for *At Close Range*, which looks like a buddy film starring Penn and Christopher Walken. If that sounds wrong, it's because we didn't see it. And neither did anyone else.

PAPA DON'T PREACH
It's *the* Madonna video for many, with the iconic cropped blonde hair (times two), the Staten Island backdrop, the story about teenage pregnancy and the lyrics from the second single from *True Blue* played out almost scene by scene. James Foley is in the director's chair once more, and while his job is to take Madonna's words and literally film a story around them, the simple concept becomes what is now regarded as one of Madonna's most memorable videos. OK, that's really down to Madonna's reinvented look – all boob tube and that infamous 'Italians Do It Better' T-shirt – but, whatever, it's the standout video from *True Blue*. (Although those stairs she walks up look *really* dangerous in hindsight. Where was health and safety back in 1986?).

TRUE BLUE
With the first two videos from *True Blue* being a) a promo video for a film and b) filmed in Staten Island, this is a complete contrast – almost like it's in colour to their black and white. The truth is that the video was in fact shot in a studio and had some cash thrown at it – by this time the Sire Records execs must have known the success they had on their hands with the album. The 60s homage is obvious and the lyrics are twee – and brilliant because of that – but the video has become yet another iconic moment in Madonna's triumphant career. (And she has many of those just from this album.)

OPEN YOUR HEART
Directed by Jean-Baptiste Mondino, *Open Your Heart*'s video still oozes cash – by now the coffers at Sire were overflowing. The action centres around the young lad (actor Felix Howard who would later pen tunes for Sugababes, Amy Winehouse and Kylie as well as co-present *The Tube*) trying to get into a peep show and Madonna putting on quite the performance – this is the first (but not last) time 'nipple tassels' and 'Madonna' would be used in the same sentence. Madonna kisses Howard *on the lips* – which, of course, caused controversy back then. And we think we live in an easily offended world now…

LA ISLA BONITA
Famous as being the *True Blue* song to tap into the Latin sound, this Mary Lambert-directed video sees another image change (or two) for Madonna – David Bowie did five in the space of five albums, Madge did that in five videos. As the fifth promo from *True Blue*, it's extraordinary that it has such a grandiose feel, with 500 extras and great direction and storytelling. But the real takeaway here is that only after watching this, *Papa Don't Preach, Open Your Heart* and *True Blue* back to back, do you realise how much Madonna achieved. One iconic video from an album would be enough for most. Four is just greedy.

phone but it was actually Sean Penn. He said, 'Can you come to Jamie Foley's [the director of *At Close Range*] house right now?', and I said, 'Not right at this minute!' You know, Michael's standing here and Quincy is standing here! But when I finished, I drove to his house and she [Madonna] was there with Sean and Jamie, and they said, 'We love the song and we want to use it for the [Sean Penn] movie. And Madonna said, 'Well who is going to sing?' We all said, 'You are' but she said, 'It's too low for me, too weird'."

Jamie then consequently hired Leonard to score the film – on Madonna's recommendation – "so I got fired, wrote that song and then got hired to do another film that same day!" Leonard laughs. Not only that, one of the songs Leonard presented to Quincy Jones was *La Isla Bonita*. Jones turned it down, Madonna picked it up.

Stephen Bray was the other producer and songwriter on *True Blue*. He was a long-term Madonna associate and ex-boyfriend, and his qualifications to work on the album were certainly impressive. He had originally replaced Madonna in their early band Breakfast Club, but the two worked on demos together, four tracks of which led to Madonna getting signed to Sire Records. He would then get co-writing credits on Madonna's second album, *Like A Virgin*, not to mention helping write a certain song: *Into The Groove*.

Bray and Leonard had the chops, then, certainly what you might call safe pairs of hands, and it was understandable that Madonna would trust them to both co-produce

On location in Staten Island, New York City for the *Papa Don't Preach* video

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and co-write the majority of *True Blue*. But that's not to say the album is particularly safe. It certainly ramps up the sophistication to appeal to a bigger audience, but also features wider instrumentation and a more varied feel, from the first single *Live To Tell* (which Leonard said terrified the record company due to its length and 'weirdness') to the Spanish themed *La Isla Bonita*.

Recording started in December 1985 with the track *Open Your Heart*, and finished a mere five months later, testament to how smoothly the process went, and a reflection of the brevity of the songwriting process which mostly took place before the album was recorded, and one which Leonard detailed to *Music Business Worldwide*. "I would put something together," he explained,"usually just on piano, and then she [Madonna] would come in at about 11, we'd mess around with whatever needed to be messed around with, she'd write a lyric, she'd sing it, and the next day we would do another song, one a day."

Bray and Leonard would switch production duties during the album's recording and each producer had their own level of input with Bray telling *MLVC: The Madonna Podcast* that his role was "to shape things and maybe create arrangements and to show off the song better which I think is the important job of collaborators".

Meanwhile Leonard would get more involved with the instrumentation on certain tracks, sequencing the bass for *Open Your Heart*, for example. However, the two producers both share equal credit for *Where's The Party*, a track which was written during the recording process, such was the creativity in the studio at the time.

"I think at that point we were all having fun," Leonard told *USA Today*. "There's a chemical thing that contributes to that 'thing' and why those records are what they are. They were relatively spontaneous for the most part. As legend has it, most of those vocals are the only time Madonna sang [the songs in the studio] and I can attest to that. It helped that neither she nor I are second guessers. Period."

The first of five singles, *Live To Tell* was released three months before the album, a track chosen by Madonna as the debut, but against the record company's wishes. Leonard told *Top 2000 a gogo*. "Believe me that was one scared record company!' She said, 'It's the first single' and they said, 'It's over, you're doomed, you're putting out a seven-minute single that stops three times."

As is so often the case, though, Madonna was proven correct and *Live To Tell* provided a perfect precursor for second 45 *Papa Don't Preach*, a song, of course, not without controversy. "They're going to say I am advising every young girl to go out and get pregnant," Madonna again correctly predicted. This controversy didn't stop its sales – if anything, it helped – and it would prove to be the ideal launchpad for *True Blue*'s stratospheric launch.

The album was released in June 1986 and certainly achieved its goal of getting a wider and older audience. *Rolling Stone* magazine said, "Madonna's sturdy, dependable, lovable new album remains faithful to her past while shamelessly rising above it." But then they also said, "*True Blue* may generate fewer sales and less attention than *Like A Virgin*, but it sets her up as an artist for the long run." And while they were certainly right on the second point, the first turned out to be somewhat wide of the mark.

We could, of course, fill the rest of this feature with stats on how well *True Blue* would go on to do: estimated sales of anywhere between 19 and 25 million and No.1 in 28 countries. Or the world records broken: Madonna's biggest-selling album and the biggest by a female artist of the 80s (and most likely beyond).

But the simple fact is: if you didn't know Madonna on 29 June 1986, you certainly would have by the time fifth single *La Isla Bonita* was released in February the following year. *True Blue* launched Madonna to global superstardom, yes, but its impact on music and culture helped keep her at the top of her game for the next three decades, and it might well be the record she is remembered for for many more decades to come. ■

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GLITTER IN THE GLOOM

A RETURN TO BERLIN FOR THEIR FIFTH ALBUM, *BLACK CELEBRATION* SAW DEPECHE MODE ENTER DARKER CLIMES. *CLASSIC POP* TOASTS A SHADOWY CLASSIC – AND A MILESTONE IN THEIR CAREER.

MARK LINDORES

As the 80s slipped into its latter half, the implosion of the pop titans that had defined the decade thus far suggested that pop had indeed eaten itself. The pressures of fame had resulted in issues with addiction, in-band fighting and exhaustion, taking their toll on Duran Duran, Culture Club and Spandau Ballet and Wham! took their final bow at Wembley Stadium. Although Depeche Mode hadn't yet achieved the level of success or respect afforded thosegroups, they were regarded as their peersand the release of their singles compilation in October 1985 had journalists firing up their typewriters readying their "told you so" eulogies.

Underdogs from the offset, the Basildon boys (or "Woolworths New Romantics" as producer/label boss Daniel Miller had dubbed them on their first meeting) had faced a constant stream of criticism with each release and the news of the compilation was taken as confirmation that Depeche Mode was over – the critics had been right all along, the group had been the flash-in-the-pan they'd always thought they were.

Dismissed as 'synth wimps', 'pretty boys' or 'pop fluff', the music press' punchbags had been written off ever since principal songwriter Vince Clarke left the group in 1981, forcing Martin Gore to take his place. Producing an album a year whilst maintaining a hectic touring schedule had taken its toll and, having spent ten months on the road in support of their *Some Great Reward* album, the group wasn't in shape mentally or physically to deliver a new album in 1985. A compilation containing 13 of their singles and two new tracks was planned as a reprieve for the group, not a farewell, though Dave Gahan later admitted that, had it not been for the band's resilience and determination to prove their detractors wrong, the Depeche Mode story could have been a much shorter one.

DISMISSED AS 'SYNTH WIMPS' OR 'POP FLUFF', THE MUSIC PRESS' PUNCHBAGS HAD BEEN WRITTEN OFF

"If we were ever going to split up the band it was at the end of 1985," he told *Melody Maker*, five years later. "We were really in a state of turmoil – constant arguing. Very intense. We weren't really sure where to go after *Some Great Reward* so we decided to slow things down. But it left us with too much time on our hands, and we spent most of the time arguing. It seems incredible we came out of that period with the band and our sanity intact."

Recording sessions for the two new singles (*Shake The Disease* and *It's Called A Heart*) earlier in the year had been fraught with tension and it was apparent to everyone that a break from the business, and from each other, was integral to the band surviving. Feeling trapped by the poppy confections that had proven so popular thus far, the only thing the band agreed upon was that the compilation was a chance to draw a line under everything they'd achieved so far and when they did regroup the sound and image of the band had to evolve, particularly in the case of Martin.

Gore's experimentation with a gender fluid presentation of himself had been a bone of contention with the rest of the group as they felt the attention placed on it was coming at their expense. A direct result of his immersion in the Berlin nightclubs he was frequenting, Martin's tendency to wear make-up and dresses or leather harnesses associated with the BDSM scene (very much taboo in British pop post-Frankie Goes To Hollywood) saw their credibility and sexuality questioned. Although they were all confident in their sexuality (all had long-term girlfriends and Gahan had just married Jo Fox), in the less enlightened 80s, the masses saw a man in a dress and immediately equated it with homosexuality.

Boy George, Annie Lennox and Pete Burns had been the immaculately made-up faces of the "Gender Benders", noted for their flamboyant fashions which had been very much a costume and part of their branding. With no obvious reasoning for Martin suddenly appearing in clothing traditionally assigned to the opposite sex, it was fast becoming a focal point, overshadowing everything else.

"In the '70s, with T.Rex or Bowie or the New York Dolls, it was cool to be like that," Gahan reasoned to *Melody Maker*. "Lou Reed, Iggy Pop... everyone was at it. They all got away with it. When Martin comes along in the mid-80s and does it in a straight-faced way, he gets all this flak. He thought it was funny. Away from the cameras, he would be having a good old laugh about it. We'd all have a good laugh at first. Then we realised that it was doing none of us any good. So, we kept saying to him, 'Look, you can't go out dressed like that!' Martin, of course, carried on doing it. These ludicrous fucking dresses..."

Following a few meetings to outline their future, Depeche Mode regrouped on 1 November 1985 at London's Westside Studios with Daniel Miller and Gareth Jones returning in their roles as producers. Having made a conscious decision to move away from the conventional pop sound of their early work, Martin's demos elicited concern from the label, producers and their radio plugger who were all alarmed at how much of a departure the new material was and how it would fit the musical landscape of the time. Martin, backed by the group, refused to compromise and after a week, the label gave them the go-ahead to make the album they wanted to make.

"By *Black Celebration*, we'd really realised that we were not a part of anything else that was going on with the so-called music scene in England, we were doing our own thing," Dave later recalled to *Louder*. "When we first presented a couple of songs to the radio plugger, Neil Ferris, their faces… it was fun to see. Excited? No, the complete opposite, like, "Where's the song for the radio?" We had realised that that was not our thing."

Rather than opining the fact that they didn't belong to any scene (they were most often likened to New Romantics and that was long over), they used their differences to their advantage. The songs were abstract both structurally and thematically and harboured a darkness and tension designed to invoke a mood. In order to achieve their goal, Daniel Miller suggested they "live the album", by which he meant immersing themselves in the creative process. Inspired by German film director Werner Herzog, it was a risky strategy given the fragility of the band's relationships at the time, but the tension, gloom and paranoia (aided by extensive smoking of marijuana) all helped create the mood of the record. For 14 hours per day, for 120 days, the team worked tirelessly.

Depeche Mode live on stage in Rotterdam, 24 May 1986

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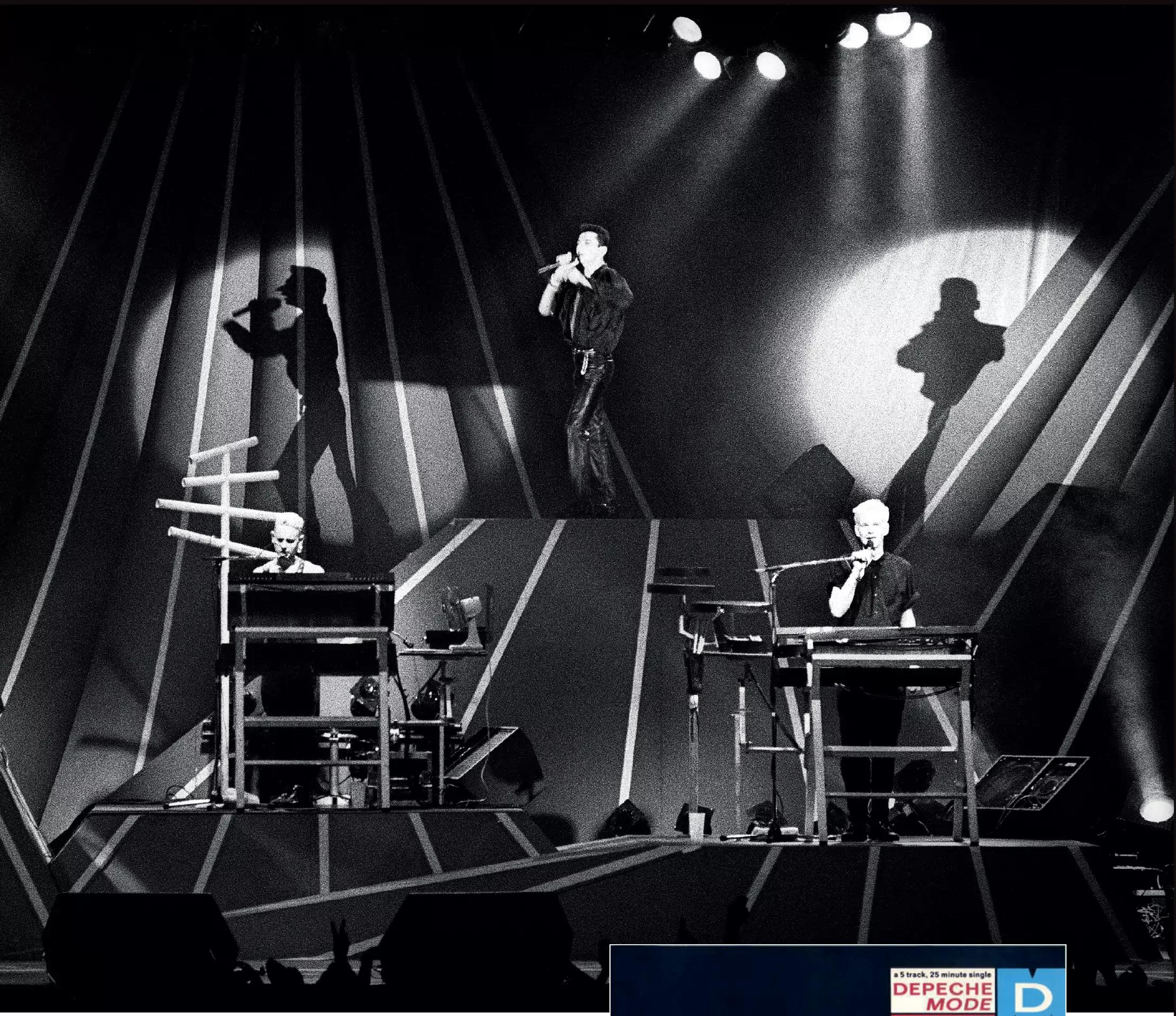
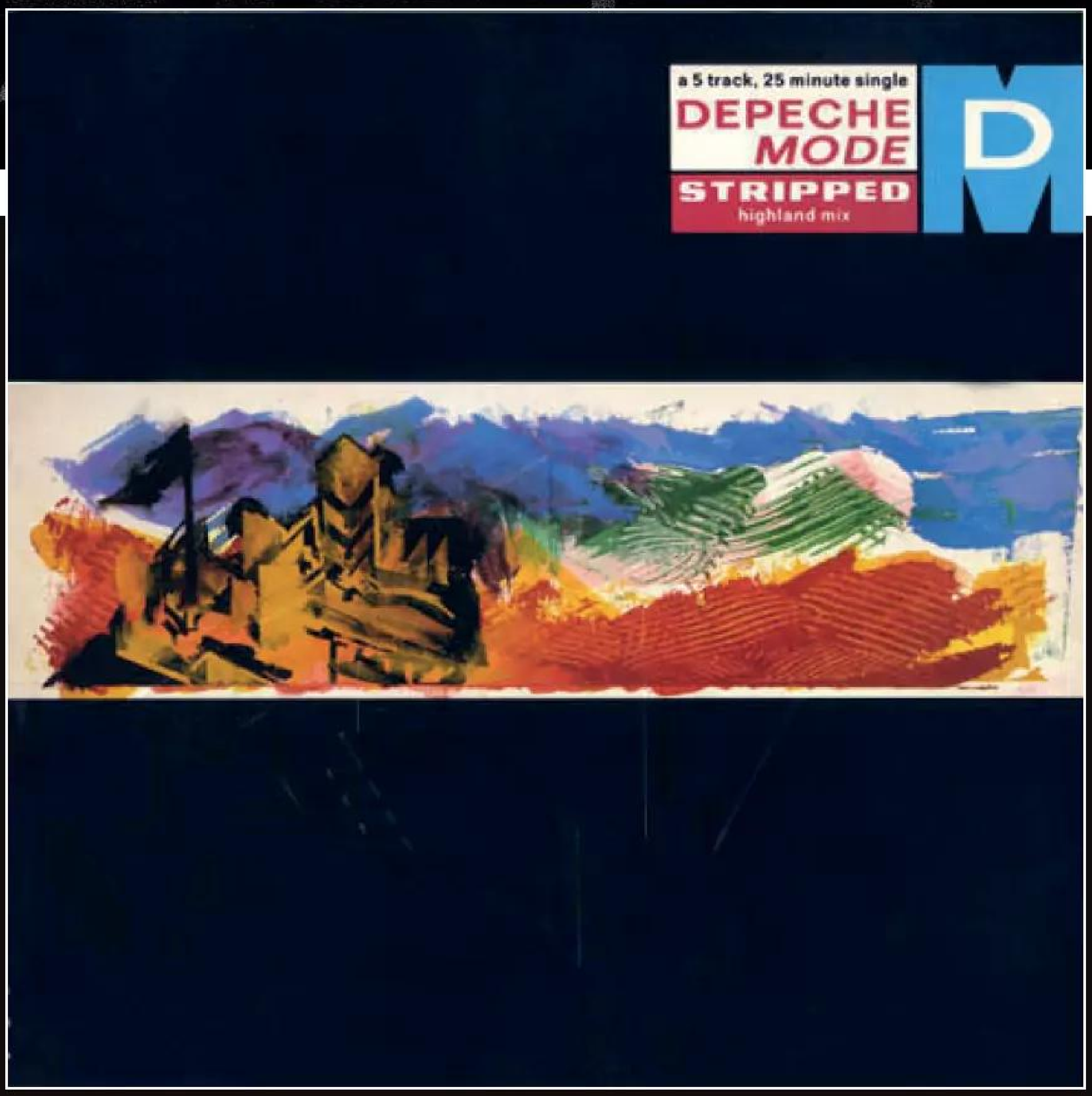
DEPECHE MODE
BLACK CELEBRATION

Black Celebration **reached No.4 in the UK and has been cited as one of the most influential albums of the 80s**





B-SIDES AND REMIXES

While previous albums had seen Depeche Mode select their B-sides from the leftover tracks that didn't make the final tracklisting of the album, *Black Celebration* saw a marked change in their approach. For this album, they wrote new songs specifically for the B-sides of their singles. This proved liberating for the group – not only did they have the freedom to create material which didn't necessarily fit the theme or sound of the album, they were also able to be even more experimental as they didn't have to consider radio play or chart positions.

"There was never a sense that a B-side was a throwaway," Producer Gareth Jones later recalled. There was also a sense of relief compared to the weight of writing and recording something that was to be part of a body of work. On this album in particular, they had spent weeks mixing a song, the usual time allocation for something that was to be a B-side was one day.

Remixes were also something that the band were rethinking. Rather than just produce a 12" version that simply extended the track with some drum fills, and a few extra choruses, such was the template for many, the idea of completely changing a song appealed and they recorded the experimental *Black Day* and *Breathing In Fumes*, which were based on *Black Celebration* and *Stripped*, respectively. This was something they'd explore throughout their career, commissioning a host of producers and DJs to reinterpret their music.

One of the first songs they worked on, *Stripped* determined the direction of the record. With the ignition of Dave's Porsche and fireworks among the many sounds sampled to create an atmospheric bank of sound, the track ignited their creative spark as they got to work massaging Martin's demos into fully formed Depeche Mode songs. *Fly On The Windscreen*, which had been the flipside to *It's Called A Heart*, was remixed for inclusion as the band felt it was too strong to be buried as a B-side. *Black Celebration* encompassed the new sonics but was catchy enough to appeal to fans of their old sound – likewise with *But Not Tonight*. "We were on a real mission to prove to people that electronic music was a valid type of music," Andy Fletcher said.

WITH THE IGNITION OF DAVE'S PORSCHE AND FIREWORKS SAMPLED, *STRIPPED* IGNITED THEIR CREATIVE SPARK

After two months in London, January 1986 saw them return to Berlin to work once again in the famed Hansa Mischraum. The record was to be the third to be recorded at least partially in Berlin, offering the focus required to finish the record. Explaining the appeal of the German capital to *Number One* magazine Dave said: "It's the atmosphere. It's a little place and it feels very cut off. There are no distractions like in London. The studio is right next to the Berlin Wall but none of us has ever been to the East. Martin tried once but they refused him entry. Didn't like the way he was dressed. Thought he was a hooligan. People imagine we work here because it's wow, you know, really heavy, but I don't feel that. The place is quite suburban. Berlin's like Brixton."

The album sessions continued throughout January and February. As Martin's growing confidence saw him writing from a much more vulnerable place, it made sense that he would sing them. Of the album's 11 tracks, Martin took the lead on four, including the sublime *A Question Of Lust* (released as the album's second single). When asked about the song on a Dutch television interview, a visibly awkward Martin simply described it as "a love song".

"The problem is, I can't open up and explain the songs," Martin told *Number One*. "When I write it all seems logical. I create the right atmosphere – which is an attempt to get away from the softness of contemporary pop – but I know we'll never be totally extreme. Depeche Mode is a democracy and that stops me writing everything in one direction. Apart from that I still believe in an old-fashioned song style and I like lots of melody. Some people can't handle that. We can be really poppy one minute or we can sound harder and moodier."

Later revealing to *Alert* magazine that "most of the songs I write deal with various aggregate statuses of relationships", it is obvious with very personal songs such as *World Full Of Nothing* and *Sometimes* that *Black Celebration* marked a huge milestone in his songwriting.

Released one month prior to the album in February '86, *Stripped* was a bold choice to relaunch the group. Despite its provocative title, the track was actually a commentary on grounding and centring oneself away from technology and outside influences, the shedding of materialism (the US label missed the point and wouldn't release it as a single there). Despite stalling at No.15 in the UK, the multi-layered industrial-sounding track and anthemic chorus was the perfect reintroduction and the foundation for where Depeche Mode were headed next.

The album followed, faring much better with its No.3 chart position, becoming their highest-seller to date despite mixed reviews ("pussycats desperate to appear perverted as an escape from the superficiality of teen stardom," sneered *Melody Maker*). Outlining the album's title, the band was forced to explain that it meant making the most of what you have, regardless of how bleak your circumstances are, silencing wildly inaccurate reports that it was linked to the occult.

The album's release coincided with the launch of their biggest tour to date. The UK leg concluded with two shows at Wembley Arena, before the band headed across Europe, the US and Japan before returning for a victory lap around Europe again in the summer of 1986. By far their biggest jaunt to date, they were playing to arenas of 12,000 to 20,000 capacities, cementing their reputation as a thrilling live act.

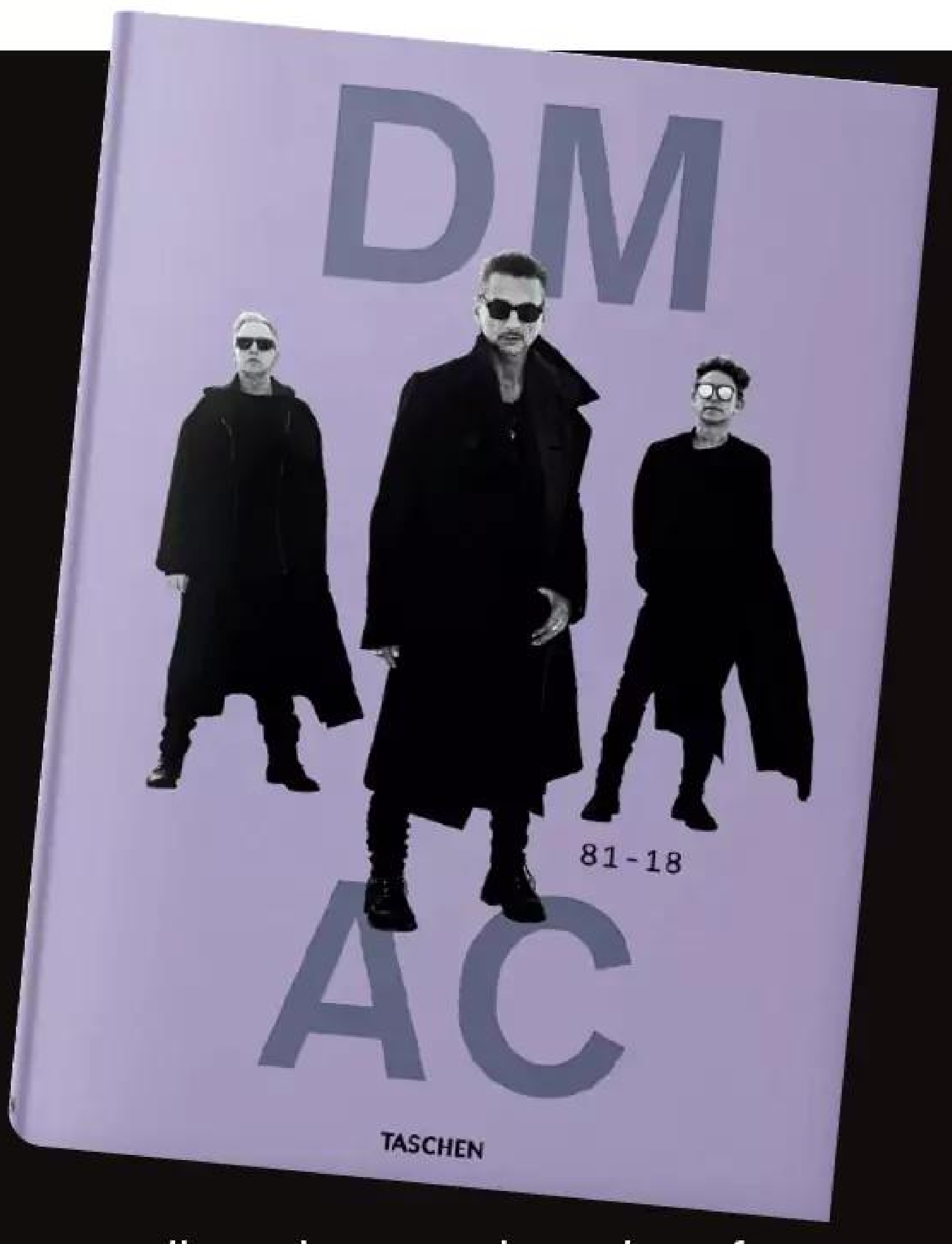
The US leg in particular had proved revelatory. The venues were deemed too ambitious when announced, given that the LP only reached No.90 there (thanks largely to the US label releasing *But Not Tonight* as the lead instead of *Stripped*). However, their international success and reputation superseded that of their homeland (and has done ever since) and the US leg was selling out vast arenas such as the L.A. Forum. While the band had strived to shed their teen image at home, it had been effortless in the US where they were embraced by the alternative rock scene and inhabited the same orbit as New Order and The Cure (influencing future acts such as Marilyn Manson and Nine Inch Nails).

As the final album recorded in Berlin and the last to be produced by Daniel Miller, *Black Celebration* marked the end of an era, it was also the beginning of a much more exciting one. It kickstarted an astonishing creative streak which would produce some of the greatest rock/electronic records of all-time and establish them as one of the biggest and most exciting bands in the world. The masses were listening and that was something worth celebrating.

INTRODUCING ANTON

1986 saw one of Depeche Mode's most significant collaborators enter their realm with the video shoot for *A Question Of Time*. On tour in the US and on a break in between shows, Depeche Mode called on photographer/video director Anton Corbijn to direct the video. He was already making a name for himself as one of rock's leading and most unconventional image-makers at the time. He had previously declined offers to work with them as he hadn't liked their early music and only agreed to take this job because it was in the US.

Realising the band had undergone some significant changes both sonically and visually, Corbijn became a fan and noticed how well matched his work was with theirs. The video marked the beginning of a lengthy relationship with the group, which has seen him curate the band's visual identity, providing a visual gravitas to match the band's increasingly dark and experimental soundscapes



As well as photographing them for album artwork and magazine shoots, he has directed the majority of their videos (including the award-winning *Enjoy The Silence* in 1990) and designed their stage shows ever since. In 2019 he made the documentary *Spirits In The Forest* which examines Depeche Mode's relationship with their fans and in 2021 celebrated their union by compiling their work together in a lavish coffee table book, *Depeche Mode By Anton Corbijn*, which was published by Taschen.

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Frontman Dave Gahan took the lead vocal on seven of *Black Celebration*'s 11 tracks

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CLASSIC ALBUM

BROTHERHOOD

NEW ORDER'

NEW ORDER'S FOURTH STUDIO ALBUM WOULD SEE THE BAND SPLIT THEIR ROCK AND ELECTRO-POP INFLUENCES OVER THE LP'S TWO SIDES. THE RESULTING RECORD, WHILE NOT BEING EXACTLY A FAN FAVOURITE, WOULD BIRTH ONE OF THEIR MOST ENDURING SONGS – *BIZARRE LOVE TRIANGLE*…

IAN WADE

Released at the end of September 1986, *Brotherhood* was something of a transitional album for New Order. Conceptually divided into two halves of 'rock' and 'electronic' sides, with one set of songs veering towards synthesizers and the other offering a guitar-based scenario. While the idea wasn't bad, in retrospect it made *Brotherhood* sound schizophrenic and a little uneven, something that Stephen Morris himself considered "didn't quite work".

Peter Hook believed that "It was here that the rock/electronic split started to surface," he recalled. "Ever the punk at heart, I loved the guitar-based material and loved it when we played together. But the others preferred the more sequencer-led tracks. In the end, the divide was so pronounced that we ended up having the guitar-based tracks on Side One and the more electronic songs on Side Two."

The beauty of New Order was the combination of these things and their ability to cohesively marry each – possibly opposing – force and both sides of their personality, and the division of the tracks in such a way split fans. No one was forced to take sides, but the old school Joy Division-heads enjoyed the indie-r rock tracks and the newer set preferred the synths. Perhaps a reswizzle of the running order would've helped to make it a solid venture. As it was, *Brotherhood* on the whole isn't terrible by any means, but it's rarely any fan's favourite New Order album, if far from the worst. If anything, it was the album that consolidated their position in

***Brotherhood* took New Order to No.9 in the UK Album Chart**

© Getty

THE SONGS ▶▶

❶ PARADISE

With two vocal lines coming in at the same time, it's a duelling of voices on this poppy opener to the album, and as Peter Hook – memorably high up with his six-string bass line – said on a Twitter Listening Party: "The *Jolene* part was indeed inspired by Dolly Parton – we'd been listening to a lot of country music." It would have been a great single too.

❷ WEIRDO

This is prime New Order, despite the wonky metaphors of the lyrics – "Just like the ocean or the sea/ Just like the blood that burns in me/ Someone like you cannot be free". It could be about someone who was lost to drugs or joined a cult. It's very much a live favourite from the time.

❸ AS IT IS WHEN IT WAS

Something of a breather after the clatter and bang of the opening pair, as Hook revealed on the Listening Party: "This is one of my favourites and another bassline that I'm very proud of. Lovely intro by Barney on the acoustic guitar. Back to the 6-string for this one. Mike Johnson, our studio engineer, did a really great job recording my bass."

❹ BROKEN PROMISE

Over to Hooky again for his inside info: "This is a really fast one – great intro with the bass and guitar. I think this is my son's favourite bassline of mine. We actually also used to play this as Revenge, Pottsy liked singing it. All this music was written before the vocals." *Broken Promise* also feels like a relapse back to Joy Division – never too far from New Order for obvious reasons – about the guilt after someone dies.

❺ WAY OF LIFE

Way Of Life was issued as a promotional 12" in the US, looking like it was likely to have become a single in that territory. "I really wanted to get another bass riff that was as good as *Age Of Consent*," said Peter Hook. "I managed it here by turning that riff backwards and using it again. Distorted bass intro. We got that by putting it through an Akai cassette player!" One of the band's little Easter eggs was the intro to *Love Will Tear Us Apart* popping up towards the end.

❻ BIZARRE LOVE TRIANGLE

The non-monster hit of *Brotherhood*. Something that defined the album, albeit the only official single from it. *Bizarre Love Triangle* went through a myriad of versions, having been played on the road long before they recorded it. Known as both 'Broken Promises' or even 'Broken Guitar Strings' at various points, it was recorded specifically to open the 'electronic' second side of the album. "We used to take our song titles from many different places – books, TV, anything we saw that sounded good we would write down and use at a later date. That's why a lot of our songs have titles that are completely separate to the lyrics."

❼ ALL DAY LONG

New Order's lyrics had been fairly oblique and abstract, but during this period things started to come into more focus and *State Of The Nation*'s lyrics – 'So don't tell me about politics/ Or all the problems of our economics/ When you can't look after what you can't own/ You scream and shout all day long' – are much more pointed. Hooky remarked that "Barney was certainly more interested in this side of the LP but these songs actually have less vocals? Interesting." *All Day Long* also had elements of Richard Wagner's Prelude to *Das Rheingold*, which the band would use as an intro tape.

❽ ANGEL DUST

A little bit of discordancy to remind people that the band hadn't fully gone pop, opening with a Middle Eastern prayer call, *Angel Dust* is an industrial number filled with gunshots, distortion, brash piano, thrash guitar and the sort of drum programming that allowed Morris to have a right old riot. The band issued it in a remix called *Evil Dust* as part of a CDV (video CD) release of *True Faith* although it had previously been part of a compilation called *Funky Alternatives* pitched alongside tracks by DAF, Chris & Cosey and 23 Skidoo.

❾ EVERY LITTLE COUNTS

As Hooky said: "The lyrics to this song were done at 5am at the end of a long session in Ireland, when everyone had just had enough." The song was inspired by Lou Reed's classic 1972 track, *Walk On The Wild Side*, and as Johnson recalled, was painstakingly pieced together: "It was very long originally, so it had to be restructured, and the extra piece at the end was one of Gillian's ideas. The song had to fit together like a jigsaw puzzle." The ending came from Bernard pressing every key on his Emulator to create an almighty racket, before a scratched vinyl effect ends the album abruptly. Morris later said: "What we should have done is make the tape version sound like the tape getting chewed up. The CD could have the sticking sound."

❿ STATE OF THE NATION

Inspired by the band's Japanese translator, who claimed that any groupies who'd follow the band around were actually 'the shame of the nation', which New Order thought was funny and adapted to use for a remix of the song. With *State Of The Nation*, however, a little confusingly, the 'Shame' version was featured on the expanded edition of *Low-Life*. It was also released in some territories as the B-side of *Bizarre Love Triangle*. To confuse matters further, *State Of The Nation* was actually released a week before *Brotherhood*, and ended up being added to the CD version.

the US, nestled between *Low-Life* and *Technique*, newer fans would eventually see the artistic development across the three.

There were also constraints on the band, now signed to Warner Brothers in America, on Quincy Jones' Qwest imprint, who were breathing down the band's neck to knock out a follow-up to *Low-Life* as soon as possible. "Warners were keen for a speedy follow-up," claimed Morris in his autobiography, *Fast Forward*, "and we were writing, rehearsing and recording at a rate which today seems impossible."

However, as it turned out, this was a fortuitous demand on behalf of Warners, as *Brotherhood* arrived just at the time New Order's stock began to rise across the Atlantic, after the inclusion of *Shellshock* on the *Pretty In Pink* soundtrack, as well as a vast US tour that took the band across the country right up until Christmas. "The idea was to capitalise on our growing US popularity, which we did," Hook reflected in his book. "We wanted to behave like a regular band by doing a regular long tour, and indeed it turned out to be the zenith of our touring career… *Brotherhood* set that up for us."

Nevertheless, the quartet spent spring in London's Jam Studio, before heading off to Windmill Lane in Dublin, which had had a hand in most of U2's output up until 2000, when they were based there. "The sessions went well… we had a huge flat near Hyde Park," recalled Hook.

The LP was engineered by Michael Johnson, who was also responsible for their last two albums, *Power, Corruption & Lies* and *Low-Life*. Johnson reflected on this period to *Sound On Sound*: "We worked on backing tracks and a couple of vocals at Jam Studios, London, over a period of six weeks. Then we booked two weeks in Windmill Lane Studios, Dublin, to do vocals and overdubs but we had to extend it to three weeks in the end. We finished off mixing the album in Amazon Studios, Liverpool. The way we work is that the band produce themselves but allow me quite a lot of say in choosing what is put down on tape and how. They record all their stuff, initially, on a 4-track Teac 3340 in their rehearsal studio in Manchester, where they jam for hours. Then, in the studio, this is listened to for good ideas. With *Brotherhood* four songs were totally finished by the time they came into the studio – *Bizarre Love Triangle*, *Weirdo*, *All Day Long* and *As It Is When It Was*."

Johnson had become used to New Order's method of recording by this point, and the somewhat unusual set-up the band would have in the studio: "Barney doesn't like recording in the normal way, i.e. using headphones – he likes to do all his vocals in the control room. He used a very cheap Beyer handheld stage mic on *Brotherhood* which didn't sound brilliant, but he was relaxed while recording, which is more important. Peter Hook's bass on this was very hissy, originally. The phasers and pre-amplification he uses to make his bass sound create a lot of hiss on the tape, and if you rub it out you get rid of a lot of his sound as well. I just put a mic in front of his amp and recorded what came out."

The speed of recording allowed plenty of time for the band to experiment.

THE VIDEOS ▶▶

BIZARRE LOVE TRIANGLE

Directed by American artist Robert Longo (whose *Men In The Cities* print series of sharply dressed men and women writhing in contorted emotion directly inspired the video), this one features a man and a woman flying through the air (possibly aided by trampoline). *Men In The Cities* also pops up in the film *American Psycho* where it appears that Patrick Bateman has some of the series in his apartment. The sharp cut-ups and montage of images would also come in handy for later work on R.E.M.'s *The One I Love* and Megadeth's *Peace Sells* promos. *BLT* breaks into a black and white scene where actors Jodi Long and E. Max Frye are arguing about reincarnation, in which Long emphatically declares: "I don't believe in reincarnation because I refuse to come back as a bug or as a rabbit!" Frye responds, "You know, you're a real 'up' person." The shots of New Order at the start are slow motion, and there's footage of them performing live seemingly in front of a projection of the video throughout, alongside fireworks, escalators, flowers and interference. Very art.

STATE OF THE NATION

A grainy, occasionally blue-hued or black and white and sometimes colour (sometimes all at once) performance video of the band playing live in a club intercut with a shaven head individual running around car parks, stations, standing by fire and smoking fags. The video was directed by Andy Delaney and Monty Whitebloom as BIG TV! The duo worked together on the film *Love Is Blind*, and promo videos such as Seal's *Crazy* and Spice Girls' *2 Become 1*, and while Whitebloom has since worked mostly in television with the occasional promo for acts such as David Gray, you're more likely to have seen Delaney's work with videos such as Usher's *Pop Ya Collar*, Lauryn Hill's *Doo Wop (That Thing)*, George Michael & Mary J Blige's *As*, The Beloved's *Sweet Harmony*, Tori Amos' *Cornflake Girl* and Soul II Soul's *Back To Life*.

“WE ALSO WORKED HARD IN JAM TO GET THE LEAD GUITAR LINES TO SOUND AS ENNIO MORRICONE AS POSSIBLE – AND EVEN THREADED WASHERS ON THE GUITAR STRINGS”

PETER HOOK

Bizarre Love Triangle **has always been a fan favourite live**

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Bernard has said that the title of *Bizarre Love Triangle* came from a *News Of The World* headline

© Getty

"We also worked hard in Jam to get the lead guitar lines to sound as Ennio Morricone [the film composer] as possible – and even threaded washers on the guitar strings to give us a more metallic sound, like we did on [*Low-Life's*] *Sunrise*," remembered Hook, who also remarked that Sumner then headed to Liverpool's Amazon studios to mix the tracks that made up the album's second side. "Barney later worked on the mix… harder than I had ever seen him work before. He wanted the production to be just right."

Brotherhood was maybe slightly baffling not just for the mood division, but also being home to one of the band's greatest singles. *Bizarre Love Triangle* ranks among their top numbers, and the long list of cover versions of the track are testament to the song, but in the UK it did precisely bugger all (well, it ended up at No.56, which a bit of a disaster in the grand scheme of positions, following up the Top 30 success of *Shellshock* and *State Of The Nation*). It did, however, reach the Top 5 on Billboard's US Hot Dance Music/Club Play Singles chart and also went Top 5 in Australia. "*Bizarre Love Triangle* became New Order's greatest miss," Morris remarked in his book, "An absolutely perfect pop record if ever there was one. It had a brilliant video, again by Michael Shamberg, and always sounded fantastic live. I'm particularly proud of my Emulator playing on that one. Today it's up there with everyone's favourites, but in 1986 it was a damp squib. A thing that baffles me to this day."

As Sumner remembered to *Smash Hits*: "The title was inspired by the *News Of The World*. I was reading it one Sunday and thinking how ridiculous it was – especially the headline, 'Saucy Vicar Caught In Bizarre Love Triangle' and thought, 'We'll call our new song that!'"

> "DEMOCRACY CAN BE A LITTLE TRICKY WHEN ALL MEMBERS HAVE DIFFERENT IDEAS. WE CAN NEVER AGREE ON A TITLE, WHICH IS WHY SOME OF THEM END UP REALLY BORING."
>
> **BERNARD SUMNER**

The story of the album's other key track is *actually* a little bizarre. The closer, *Every Little Counts*, seems a bit of a daft throwaway compared to the rest of *Brotherhood*, but almost as a release after all the pressure the band were under in trying to get the album finished. Said Sumner: "Yeah, well the album was… really hard work, we wrote 70 per cent of it in the studio, and we got to this last song and I started singing it dead serious but when I got to that line about a pig, well, it just sounded ridiculous and I burst out laughing. We could have done it again but we thought, fuck it, it works as it is."

As for the title itself, *Brotherhood* was decided on by each member putting names in a hat, and the one with the most votes winning. Bernard commented at the time, mischievously that, "Democracy can be a little tricky when all members have different ideas. We can never agree on a title, which is why some of them end up really boring."

As Hook puts it: "Despite the divide between the acoustic and electronic songs, I'm still fond of it. When I listen to it now, I'm positive that [the rock songs] on Side One have weathered the years better, yet the songs on Side Two are now my favourites!"

The critical reaction at the time was mixed: Steve Sutherland at *Melody Maker* offered a word salad of, "Infuriatingly enigmatic, every song strains between adrenalised instrumental passages of thundering majesty and lyrics of such embarrassing openness that the listener is repeatedly frustrated and forced to impugn motives to their apparent schizophrenia. Is this tension between frailty and fury a callous formula or shivering naked naivety? I can't decide."

Sumner told *Sounds* at the time: "Because I'm so melancholy I suppose I'm always unhappy with everything we've done. I don't like the production on *Brotherhood*… we've got Rolls Royce songs crammed inside Cortina bodywork." But he later recalled to *Uncut* that, "It's not as good as *Low-Life*. I remember going on holiday to Corfu, playing it on a Walkman and thinking, 'Fucking hell, that's shit.'"

Gillian, however, is more direct, telling *Uncut*, "I don't like the songs as much as our others. I don't like the sleeve. I don't like the name."

Brotherhood, then. An album of two sides (quite literally) whose rushed process to deadline in order to break them in America worked. Neither a masterpiece but by no means terrible. ■

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DURAN NOTORIOUS

ALBUM INSIGHT

NOTORIOUS

DURAN DURAN

RETURNING FROM THEIR HIATUS DIMINISHED IN SIZE AND STATURE, THE THREE-MAN DURAN DURAN RECRUITED TWO NEW MEMBERS AND TURNED TO NILE RODGERS TO HELP THEM GET THEIR GROOVE BACK, RESULTING IN THEIR FUNKIEST WORK TO DATE…

MARK LINDORES

Following Duran Duran's mid-80s hiatus during which they indulged their musical infidelities in the form of The Power Station, Arcadia and solo experiments, the group's planned reunion in 1986 was not what any of them had expected. As well as being down to a three-piece following the departures of Andy and Roger Taylor, the band had split from long-term managers Paul and Michael Berrow, the Birmingham brothers that had guided them to global stardom.

It wasn't just the band itself that had changed – the pop world had undergone a seismic shift post-Live Aid, developing a social conscience that rendered the vulgarity of globe-trotting playboys flaunting their wealth and excesses in everyone's faces null and void. Meanwhile, in the land of the teen mags that Duran Duran once ruled, Norwegian trio a-ha had stolen the hearts of Britain's teenage girls with their impossibly catchy hits and heartthrob lead singer Morten Harket, causing many to question what the future held for Duran Duran.

As the band regrouped to discuss their fourth studio album, they were essentially a four-piece. Roger Taylor had made it clear from the offset that he wanted to leave the band and the music business altogether. Burnt out after half a decade of mass hysteria and intense scrutiny, he moved to a farm to instil normality back into his life.

Andy Taylor was trickier. After weeks of uncertainty as to whether he was rejoining or not, he left without telling the others. Then he assembled a legal team to conduct his departure, at one point even

THE SONGS ▶▶

RELEASE DATE: 18 NOVEMBER 1986
LABEL: EMI (UK), CAPITOL (US)
PRODUCERS: DURAN DURAN, NILE RODGERS

SIDE A
① NOTORIOUS
② AMERICAN SCIENCE
③ SKIN TRADE
④ A MATTER OF FEELING
⑤ HOLD ME

SIDE B
⑥ VERTIGO (DO THE DEMOLITION)
⑦ SO MISLED
⑧ MEET EL PRESIDENTE
⑨ WINTER MARCHES ON
⑩ PROPOSITION

attempting to stop the band using the Duran name.

“Andy really messed us around,” Simon recalls. “It made the whole artistic process really difficult because we had to have meetings with lawyers at 10 in the morning, and these would drag on, then we’d try to get on with work, but it was hard to get into creative mode after that.”

Though Andy’s departure had a negative impact creatively, John Taylor remembers the remaining three members bonding closer than before. “It galvanised us,” he says. “We had gone on our own paths with The Power Station and Arcadia, but our relationships after that moved to a whole new level, because we were now just three, fighting to survive. Like one of those soccer teams down to 10 men – stronger, more determined, more focused. Less can be more. That was the silver lining.”

Though the trio had begun writing and recording in London and France, they had no clear direction for the record. Demoing tracks, some of which would survive, they nicknamed them after Hitchcock films for identification purposes. Their only criteria for the record was that it was to be a Duran funk album. With that in mind, they asked Nile Rodgers to fill in as guitarist, not wanting to recruit permanent new members as they were still unsure whether the situation with Andy would be resolved.

“I always describe Duran Duran as my second band after Chic,” Rodgers told *Spinner*. “I think that we were the right pairing at the right time. I don’t like to overly take credit for anything, but since they said it first… Had I not been there in their lives at that pivotal time of their lives, when we did *Notorious*, when the two other Taylors left, that’s a heavy blow to a band at the top of their career.

“I think I was the glue that held that together. I used to say to the guys, ‘People don’t realise how great you are. You’re still like this boy band and the girls are still talking about your looks, and the music becomes sort of an added bonus. Now it’s time to go in the direction where you can become more like a U2 that’s really classic and solid artistically. You gotta build that foundation, and let’s take the fans along with us.’ And that’s what the *Notorious* album was supposed to do.”

John Taylor and Simon Le Bon at the Secret Policeman’s Third Ball in London in March 1987

© Getty

With Rodgers on board as guitarist (and later taking on production duties), they completed their line-up with Warren Cuccurullo (who had contacted the band and offered his services after Andy Taylor informed him he’d left the group) and drummer Steve Ferrone. These incoming members combined with the originals’ new-found renewed vigour and passion to ignite a fresh creative flare.

The title track, one of the first to be written, set the tone for the rest of the record. “*Notorious* was such an important song for us, because Simon, Nick, and I were left holding the flame, sort of wondering, ‘Can we keep this going? Can we maintain the momentum?’” John explains. “We’d already taken a break and we knew we weren’t the biggest band in the world anymore, and the question was, did we have a hit in us? And, again, we have to be grateful for Nile, because Nick and Nile really sort of cooked up the main hook to the opening, the guitar hook to the song. And by the time we finished it, we knew we had a song that could announce the next phase of the band’s career.”

> “I USED TO SAY TO THE GUYS, ‘PEOPLE DON’T REALISE HOW GREAT YOU ARE. YOU’RE STILL LIKE THIS BOY BAND AND THE MUSIC BECOMES AN ADDED BONUS. NOW IT’S TIME TO BECOME REALLY CLASSIC AND SOLID ARTISTICALLY.’”
>
> **NILE RODGERS**

Tracks such as *Skin Trade*, *Vertigo* and *American Science* displayed a loose funkiness which harked back to the disco/funk sound Rodgers had pioneered with Chic. However,unlike his work with David Bowie and Diana Ross, on which the main artists had a tendency to sound like guest performers on a Nile Rodgers record,*Notorious* retained Duran Duran’s identity, with the results revealing a more balanced collaboration.

“It was patently obvious very quickly that we were going in that funk-driven direction,” Simon says. “I was initially quite surprised, but I shouldn’t have been, because if you listen back to tracks such as *Last Chance On The Stairway* we knew we had it in us. Once we started making the music, we didn’t even think about it. The last thing on our minds was how it was going to be received. We thought it was great.”

Released in October 1986, comeback single *Notorious* reached No.7 in the UK, faring much better in the US, where it peaked at an impressive No.2. The LP followed a month later and it topped out at No.16, making it the band’s first album to miss the Top 10. Further disappointment came with both *Skin Trade* and *Meet El Presidente* missing the Top 20.

John Taylor felt disillusioned by the *Notorious* album’s failure, having felt almost certain it would be a hit. “We felt we redefined the sound of the band in a good way,” he says. “We thought the title track and *Skin Trade* were great songs. When you look back through your albums, even if they all have one great song that goes into your canon, not all of them have something unforgettable. *Notorious* in particular has done great things for us over the years.”

The title track got a new lease of life in 1999 when the chorus was sampled for a posthumous song from rapper Notorious B.I.G., forming the basis of a track now considered a hip-hop classic. More than three decades after its release, it is being discovered by new generations, and the Biggie track is used as the walkout music for mixed martial arts superstar Conor McGregor. ■

So
Peter Gabriel

CLASSIC ALBUM

SO
PETER GABRIEL

TRADING THE ECCENTRIC FOR THE ECLECTIC, WITH *SO*, PETER GABRIEL'S MULTICULTURAL MUSICALITY TOOK ITS CUES FROM ACROSS THE GLOBE, THE ALBUM'S UNIVERSAL INCLUSIVITY TRANSFORMED ITS CREATOR INTO A STAR ON THE INTERNATIONAL STAGE AND A MUSIC VIDEO MAVERICK

MARK LINDORES

While his former Genesis bandmate Phil Collins was enjoying his moment in the sun in 1985 as the continent-hopping star of Live Aid, Peter Gabriel was ensconced in the creative hub of his country estate crafting his fifth album *So*, the funky hybrid of brash pop, R&B and world music which shot him to global superstardom and saw him emerge as an unlikely poster-boy for MTV.

A decade earlier, Gabriel had left Genesis, the band he'd co-founded and helmed to the pantheon of prog-rock infamy. Regarded by many as the creative linchpin of the group, Gabriel was renowned for translating the mythical mysticism of their lyrics into their stage shows by donning a variety of outlandish get-ups which saw him wearing fox heads or pyramids, dressed as a sunflower or a succession of various historical or fictional characters.

His shock departure from the band, due to him being frustrated at having his life planned for him in two-year cycles and his newborn daughter developing an infection which saw her life hang in the balance for her first six months, led to him seeking solace in his country house and tending to his vegetable patch. He then slowly manoeuvred himself back into music, only releasing the results when he was confident he could do so on his terms.

What followed was a series of eponymous albums brimming with ideas

© Getty

THE SONGS ▶▶

❶ RED RAIN

Having gone on record stating his hatred of cymbals and hi-hats and banning them entirely from his previous two albums, Gabriel was convinced by Daniel Lanois to reintroduce them for *So* and it is the hi-hat, courtesy of The Police's Stewart Copeland, that opens the LP as the intro to the dramatic *Red Rain.*

A sonic thunderstorm, the percussive build-up of cascading drums (the result of drummer Jerry Marotta's eight takes being pieced together bar-by-bar) is apt to compound the drama of the song's lyrics which deal with social ills and the threat of nuclear war. Inspired by a vivid dream Gabriel had, the cinematic descriptions within his lyrics perfectly illustrate his vision, with references to the parting of a red sea and torture (both literal and mental). Fans of Gabriel's earlier work were rewarded by the song's continuation of the story of Mozo – a character threaded throughout his first two albums.

❷ SLEDGEHAMMER

A funky homage to Gabriel's love of classic soul music – in particular the sound of the legendary Stax record label and Otis Redding whom Gabriel had seen live in London in 1967. As well as being inspired by Redding, Gabriel also pulled off a major coup by recruiting his trumpeter Wayne Jackson, once dubbed "the greatest horn section ever" to play on the song.

A swaggering display of braggadocio (entitled after the sex act – something which bypassed the censors), *Sledgehammer* stemmed from an idea Gabriel had at the very end of the *So* recording sessions.

As the musicians were preparing to leave his studio, Gabriel asked them to lay down a demo of the song with him, so that he could mould it into something with a view to putting it on his next album. Unable to leave the track alone, he completed the track and added it to *So.*

When the label heard the album for the first time, they agreed with Gabriel that the song would be a perfect lead single, a decision which paid off as it was a Top 10 hit in the UK, topped the charts in the US (knocking Genesis' *Invisible Touch* off the top spot), and became his biggest hit around the world, thanks in part to *that* innovative video.

❸ DON'T GIVE UP

After the bombastic opening salvo of the previous two tracks, the soothing *Don't Give Up* offers respite in the form of a haunting sonic embrace which has transcended its original inspiration – that of a man facing unemployment and an uncertain future, to be regarded as an anthem of resilience and support, thanks to Kate Bush's wonderfully tender performance.

Originally inspired by the haunting photographs of Depression-era America by Dorothea Lange, Gabriel wrote the song with Dolly Parton in mind, but when she refused, Bush agreed to duet with him.

The sentiment of the track was pertinent to the situations of many in Thatcher's Britain who had suffered under her leadership. A Top 10 hit in the UK, the single unbelievably stalled at No.72 in the US.

❹ THAT VOICE AGAIN

Co-written with David Rhodes, *That Voice Again* utilises the technique of the music mirroring the lyric as its deviation from loud to quiet accentuates the lyric's theme of judgement – veering between conscience and superego, "I'm listening to the conversation judge and jury in my head," he sings. "It's colouring everything/ All we did and said."

❺ IN YOUR EYES

Written during a trip to Barcelona, *In Your Eyes* began life as a song called *Sagrada,* based on the Sagrada Familia and architect Antoni Gaudí, before being reworked into a track rumoured to have been inspired by actress Rosanna Arquette. According to director Cameron Crowe, it was she who later convinced Gabriel to allow him to use the song in a key scene of his film *Say Anything.*

Originally intended to close Side One of the record, *In Your Eyes* was moved to the beginning of Side Two to accommodate the deeper grooves in the vinyl required for the song's bassline and frenetic final minute which featured vocals from Youssou N'Dour. It was reinstated to its originally intended place as the closing track on subsequent CD reissues of the album.

❻ MERCY STREET

Having been introduced to the 'forro' sound by Djalma Corrêa during a trip to Brazil, Gabriel had written a piece called *Forro.* While experimenting in the studio, the tape was played at a slower tempo than it was supposed to, making certain instruments sound more prominent in the mix. Gabriel liked the sound of it and used it as the foundation to *Mercy Street.*

A track inspired by the work of poet Anne Sexton, particularly *Rowing, The Rowing Endeth* and *45 Mercy Street,* in which the suicidal, bipolar sufferer protagonist seeks the approval of her father and God, the fusion of the haunting lyrics and lilting, stripped-back production provide a stunning alchemy.

❼ BIG TIME

The third single from the album, *Big Time* was a return to the amplified funk sound of *Sledgehammer,* with everything thrown into the mix, including percussion from Stewart Copeland and vocals from PP Arnold. Lyrically, the song satirises the emerging materialistic and consumerist yuppie culture and the shallowness of celebrities and the showbiz world. The third UK single from the album, it peaked at No.13. It fared better in the US where it reached No.8, supported by heavy MTV rotation of its innovative video.

❽ WE DO WHAT WE'RE TOLD (MILGRAM'S 37)

Originally recorded for his third album (aka *Melt*), *We Do What We're Told* was a dreamy track that was inspired by American social psychologist Stanley Milgram's obedience experiments which took two groups of people, installed them in dominant and submissive roles and examined how that influenced their behaviour.

❾ THIS IS THE PICTURE (EXCELLENT BIRDS)

Completed just 48 hours before the final deadline for the album, Gabriel came up with the idea of reworking *Excellent Birds,* a track he'd recorded with Laurie Anderson in 1984 and performed on TV Special *Good Morning, Mr Orwell.* An appeasement for some fans who worried he'd deviated too far from his avant-garde leanings, the off-kilter song became *This Is The Picture,* which also featured a guest spot from Chic's Nile Rodgers. Due to lack of available space, *This Is The Picture* was omitted from the vinyl version of the album, only available as a bonus track on the CD and cassette versions.

Gabriel clutches his Ivor Novello awards, Grosvenor House, London, 15 April 1987

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"MUSIC HAS ALWAYS BEEN THERAPY FOR ME. THERE'S THE IDEA OF CATHARSIS, LEARNT IN MY REALM OF INTEREST FROM THE BLUES."

PETER GABRIEL

and eclecticism, which allowed Gabriel to experiment with sounds, textures and lyrics. Punctuated with the odd hit single – *Shock The Monkey, Solsbury Hill* and *Games Without Frontiers* – each album was followed by a retreat to his country pile where he was free to be as creative and experimental as he liked without deadline or expectation – the antithesis of his Genesis days, where the relentless cycle of album-tour-album-tour zapped him of drive and creativity.

As visuals had always played a prominent role in his art, from the aforementioned stage costumes, to his refusal to give his records titles, Gabriel naturally appealed to writers and filmmakers. Director William Friedkin (*The Exorcist*) had approached him to work in the role of screenwriter, a union which failed to come to fruition. One alliance that did happen, however, was with Alan Parker, who asked Gabriel to compose the score to his award-winning film *Birdy* (1984).

It was that project which brought Peter together with producer Daniel Lanois. Though he was riding a wave of success after his work on U2's *The Unforgettable Fire,* it was Lanois' introspective work with Brian Eno and Harold Budd which attracted Gabriel, who was more interested in soundscapes and creating atmosphere. Limited time constraints meant Gabriel – who likes to take his time on projects – would be unable to write an entire score, so enlisted Lanois to collaborate, giving him license to use anything from the banks of material Gabriel had amassed from earlier projects, which included unfinished songs, alternative takes and unused demos, with the proviso that Daniel would "deliver surprises".

Thrilled with the result, Gabriel asked Lanois to stay on at Ashcombe House in Somerset to produce his next studio album, on which, he wrote in the liner notes of the deluxe edition of *So,* he "wanted to get back to a more traditional form of songwriting, to have some fun, to be a bit less sombre and mysterious".

Gabriel's desire to instil more fun into his music came from feeling that he had emerged from what he called "18 months of torment" in 1983/84.

Arriving home from his 1982 tour left him "hollow and empty", feelings which drove him and wife Jill further apart and into couples therapy in a bid to save their marriage – an experience Gabriel found "powerful and humbling".

"I uncovered a lot and it's all in the songs of the album," he told *Rolling Stone* magazine in 1986. "Music has always been therapy for me. There's the idea of catharsis, learnt in my realm of interest from the blues. When the blues singer sits there and pours out his heart he's purging his soul a little bit, and he's doing so for all the audience, who can sympathise and maybe get a little emotion out, too. I know that when I can get emotion out, I suddenly feel more alive, just as if I was pulsing with new blood in a way I simply don't when I try to suppress things."

Confident that he was through the toughest times, thanks to Jill and Daniel, Gabriel's newfound optimism saw him ready to begin work on the record in March 1985. Not wanting to jeopardise his positive state of mind, and keep pressure while making the album to a minimum, rather than feel the constraints of time and money that working in a major studio would place on him, he converted the cow barn at Ashcombe House into a recording studio and bought all of the necessary equipment feeling it would ultimately prove cost-effective.

The initial sessions for *So* saw the barn split into two rooms, with Gabriel immersed in one, writing lyrics and developing song ideas, while Lanois, along with guitarist David Rhodes (who had just worked with Talk Talk) worked in the other, before the trio came together to develop the results and brainstorm. The sessions were light-hearted and fun, with the musicians regularly donning yellow hard hats (their going-to-work attire) and nicknaming themselves The Three Stooges after the legendary vaudeville act.

Over the ensuing weeks (which turned into months), an elite roster of guest musicians was recruited to work on tracks including Kate Bush, French percussionist Manu Katché, Senegalese singer Youssou N'Dour, trumpeter Wayne Jackson (who had been playing with Otis Redding when Gabriel saw him in concert in 1967) and bassist Tony Levin – all experts within their field who brought the required authenticity to their respective songs, something which was especially important to Gabriel, who felt a responsibility in highlighting the sounds he had discovered on his travels – particularly those from Africa, South America and Spain, which were embroidered throughout *So*'s tracklist.

"For any of us musicians who get ideas from other cultures, we get accused of cultural imperialism," Gabriel explained in a 1986 interview with *Spin.* "I think it's important to digest it a little rather than imitate it. If there's a lack of balance, people like me have a responsibility to provide it. At the 1982 World of Music, Arts And Dance [WOMAD] Festival that I organised, it was exciting to have Burundi drummers playing with Echo & The Bunnymen, Indian dancers with The English Beat, Chinese opera with Simple Minds and myself – a real mixture. Some of the rock'n'roll cynics at the time said there was no way that audiences would take this, we'd get booed, but nothing of the sort occurred."

At the beginning of recording the album, Lanois expected to be at Ashcombe House for a maximum of six weeks. "The truth is, we finished *So* almost a year to the day and that is the shortest time Gabriel had ever spent on an album," he explained ruefully. As the projected deadlines of July and December came and went due to Gabriel's obsessiveness over the tracklisting, tensions began to rise. Gabriel's procrastination in particular led to heated exchanges with Lanois, who was used to working more quickly and got frustrated when things ground to a halt, on one occasion smashing the telephone to stop Gabriel using it,

So received glowing reviews from music critics, who praised its songwriting craft, as well as its fusion of genres

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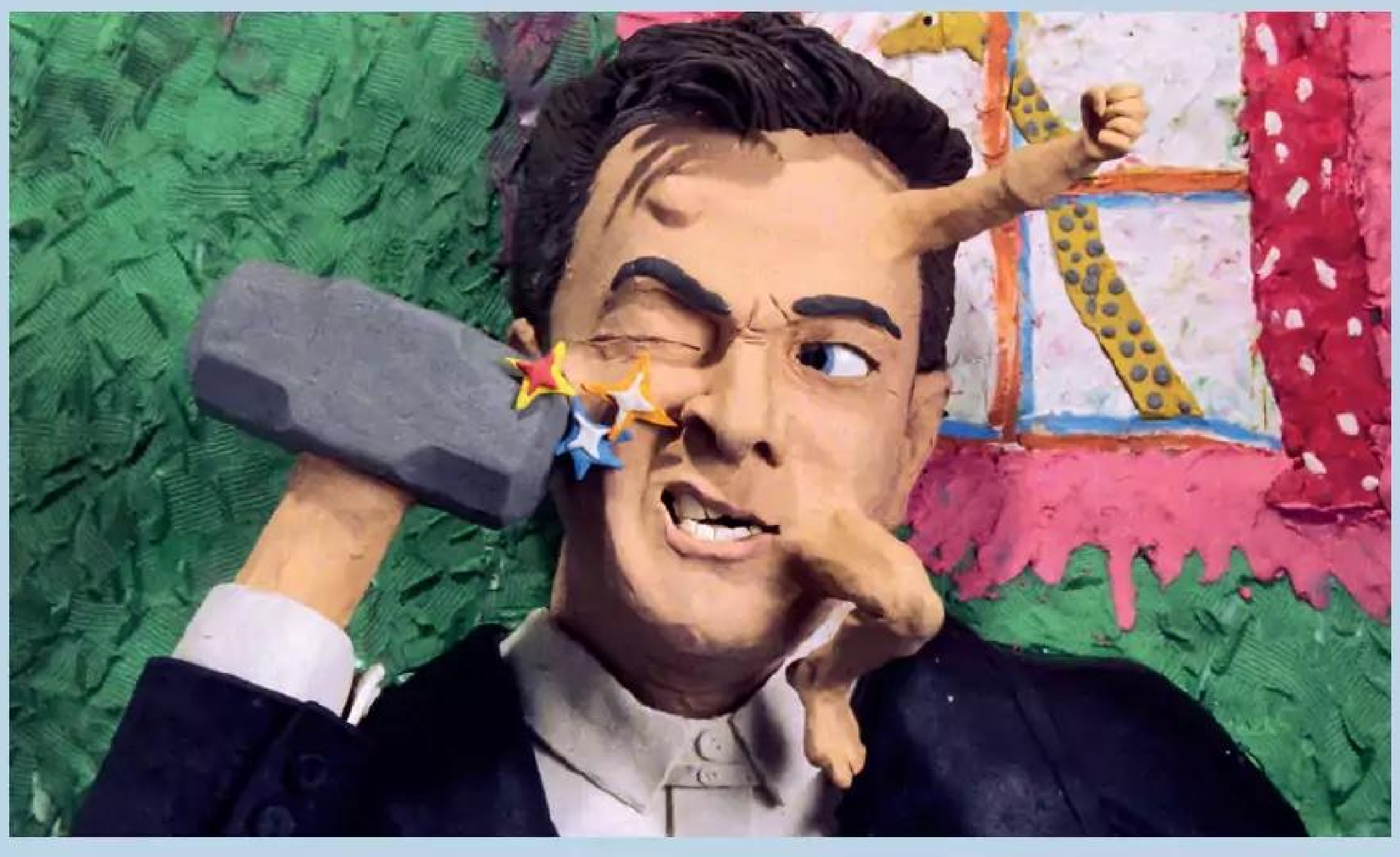
THE VIDEOS



SLEDGEHAMMER

A collaboration between director Stephen R Johnson and Aardman Animation, the shoot required Gabriel to lie under a sheet of glass for a gruelling 16 hour-shift while the visual spectacular was created around him. The video took a week of post-production to arrive at the finished product – which included dancing chickens, swimming sperm and Gabriel in a myriad of bizarre sequences.

Still one of the most-played – and best-loved – promo videos of all time, *Sledgehammer* was a benchmark in the world of videos and is still the most critically successful, picking up Brits, Grammys and a record nine MTV Awards in 1987.

DON'T GIVE UP

In this memorable Godley & Creme-directed promo, the simple-but-highly-effective result showed Gabriel and Kate Bush locked in an embrace on a revolving turntable as they performed the song. "I didn't fight their idea, I thought that five minutes of groping Kate in front of the world was perhaps not the best thing for a dodgy marriage," Gabriel would later comment. "At the time, I felt I needed a blessing. Anyway, Jill [his then wife] was great about it."

Co-director Kevin Godley didn't think a blessing was necessary due to the purity of the video. "There wasn't a sexual connotation – just one of mutual support," he said.

BIG TIME

Having set a precedent with the ground-breaking *Sledgehammer* promo, Gabriel once again called upon the services of director Stephen R Johnson to helm a video which would create a similar impact. Also utilising the latest visual techniques of stop-motion Claymation and strata-cut animation from David Daniels, with art direction from artist Wayne White, the video took weeks of post-production to bring the effects-laden clip to life. *Big Time* is the second of a trilogy between Peter and Stephen, which concluded with *Steam* in 1992.

RED RAIN

In contrast to the everything-but-the-kitchen-sink, kaleidoscopic clips given to *Sledgehammer* and *Big Time*, the Matt Mahurin-directed *Red Rain* video is notable in its simplicity, consisting mainly of a straightforward performance of the track by Gabriel, bathed in appropriate overcast grey hues, intercut with dancers performing with balletic flair and a blood red desert floor. Having been painted, doused in water and encased in a Perspex coffin for previous videos, Gabriel said it was a relief to shoot a video in which all he had to do was sing.

on another nailing the studio door shut until he had completed writing his lyrics.

Although he had made the album completely on his own terms, Gabriel was forced to make some compromises upon its completion.

Firstly, the record company refused to allow him to release the LP with the title *Peter Gabriel* as he had his previous four albums. Secondly, they wanted to include a photograph of him on the cover. Realising he had made the album with the intention of it being heard by a mass audience, Gabriel begrudgingly agreed, naming it *So* on account of it being an empty and meaningless word and it looking good on the cover graphically. It was featured prominently on the Peter Saville-designed sleeve in a bold typeface alongside a black and white portrait of Gabriel inspired by David Bailey's 60s images. "I was made to go with Peter Saville's idea for a retro-style portrait as I was told my usual obscure LP sleeves alienated women," Gabriel later said.

Released in May 1986, *So* received a warm reception from critics who praised its songwriting and fusion of styles to include elements of world music (Paul Simon's *Graceland* followed three months later). Commercially, the album was by far Gabriel's greatest success, topping the UK charts and reaching US No.2, spawning transatlantic hits in *Sledgehammer, Big Time, Don't Give Up, Red Rain* and *In Your Eyes*.

So propelled Gabriel to a global level of fame he hadn't experienced to date, either solo or with Genesis, and saw him showered with awards, become an MTV mainstay and embark on his mammoth This Way Up world tour as well as playing benefit shows for Amnesty International and Human Rights Now!. With sales of over seven million copies, *So* saw Peter Gabriel hit the big time, a success made even sweeter as he did so on his own terms. ■

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JAPAN
"IT'S AS IF WE DISCOVERED SOPHISTICATION, SUBTLETY AND NUANCE OVERNIGHT"
THE BAND ON THEIR QUIET LIFE REBIRTH
ANTHEM PUBLISHING
A LIFE LESS ORDINARY
JAPAN BIOGRAPHER AND MUSICIAN ANTHONY REYNOLDS LOOKS AT THE ORIGINS OF THE FIVE-PIECE'S SEMINAL THIRD ALBUM QUIET LIFE AND THE LATEST 2021 DELUXE REISSUE WITH REFLECTIONS FROM BAND MEMBERS AND ASSOCIATES

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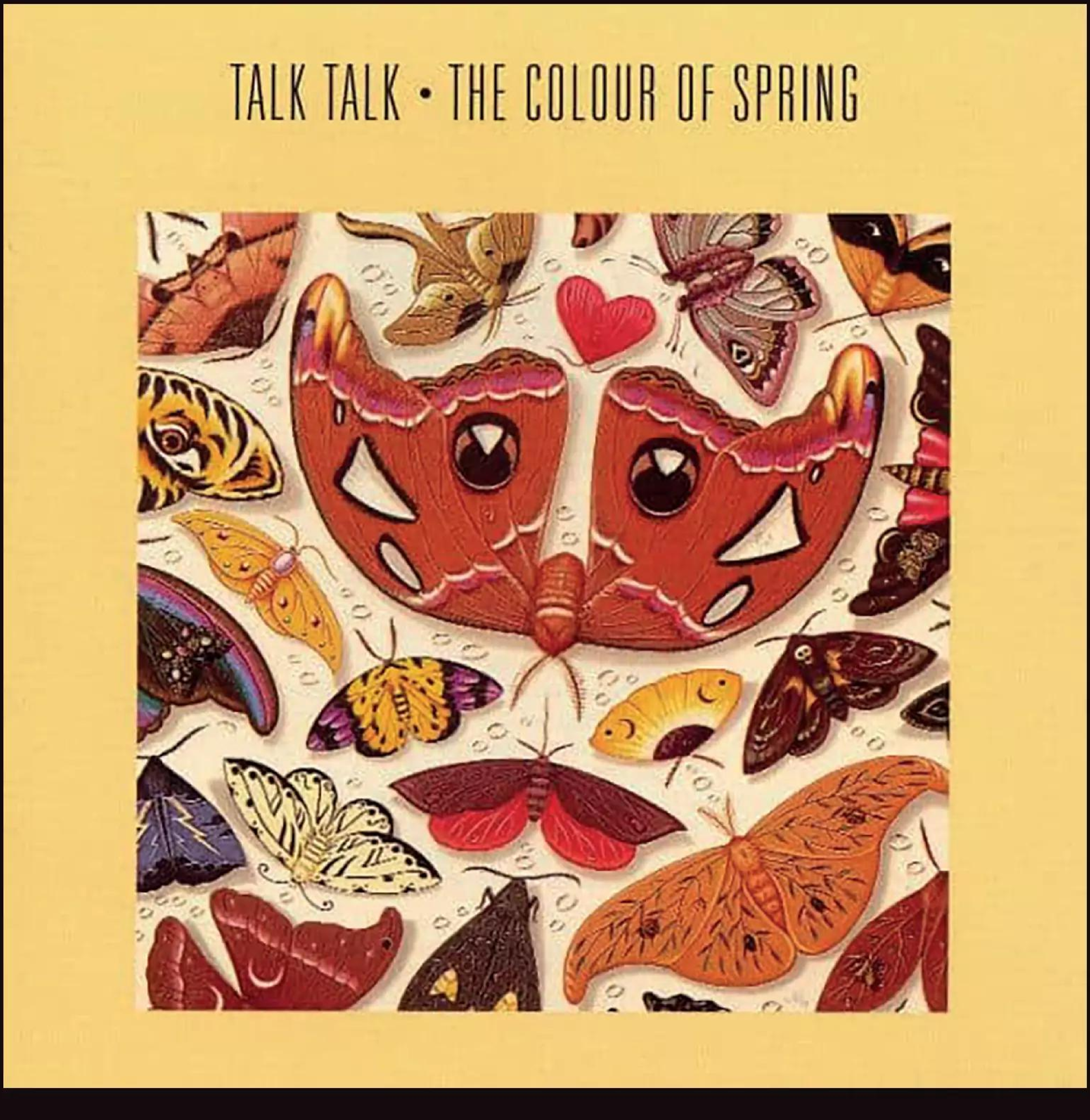
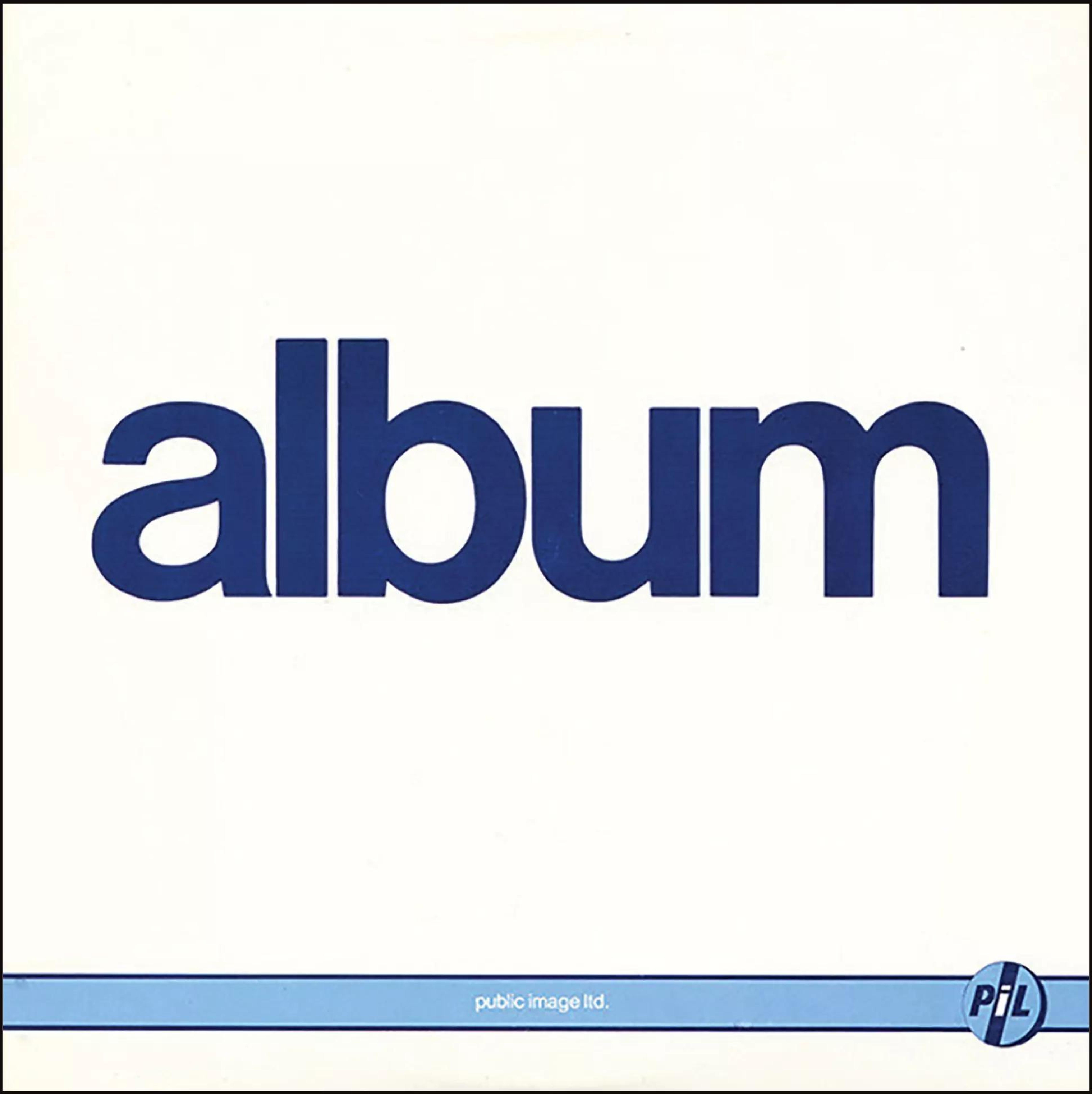
POP ART

BY 1986 THE ALBUM COVER WAS FIRMLY ESTABLISHED AS AN INTEGRAL EXTENSION TO THE MUSIC IT PACKAGED. EMBRACING EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES, SOME RECORD COVER DESIGNS LEANED TOWARDS MINIMALISM AND RESTRAINT, WITH OTHERS BASKING IN 80s EXCESS, REFLECTING THE ERA'S SPECTRUM OF CREATIVITY.

ANDREW DINELEY


TALK TALK • THE COLOUR OF SPRING

Right: Sleeve designer James Marsh utilised a stunning moth motif for Talk Talk's third album campaign

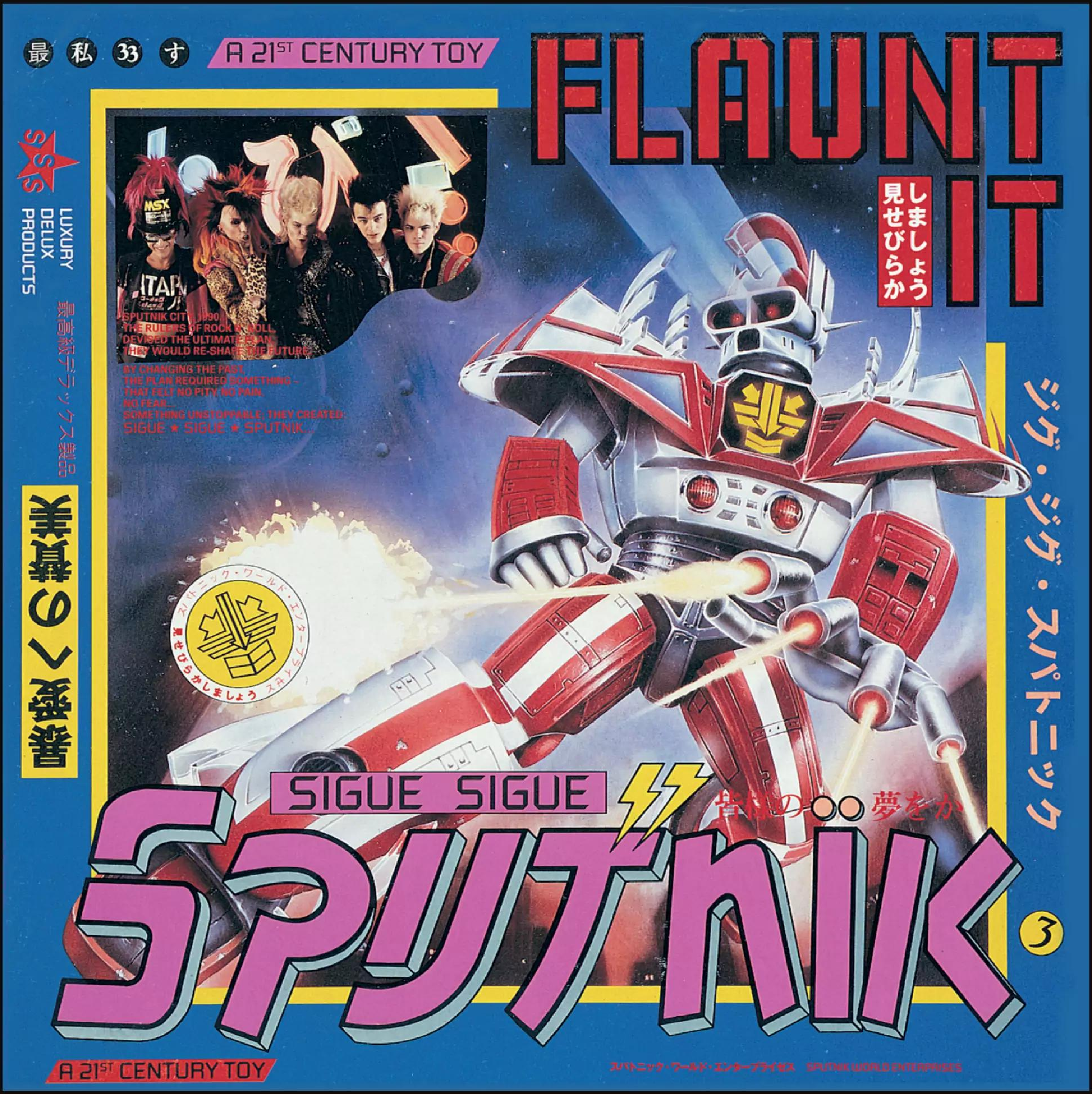


Above: PiL's graphic approach to their sleeves was intened to pastiche commercial branding

The mid-1980s cemented the role of visual artists as integral collaborators. For bands, such partnerships delivered a distinct and consistent identity, and for artists, they offered a high-profile platform for experimentation. Talk Talk's enduring collaboration with artist James Marsh illustrates this dynamic. For their third album *The Colour Of Spring*, Marsh devised a sleeve composed of moths adorned with symbolic references to the album's songs and lyrics. He later reflected on how receiving handwritten lyrics and tracklistings gave him far more material than before: "The idea was to portray solitary moths for each of the single releases, with the premise that they would eventually congregate together, forming the final cover image."

In contrast, the design of Public Image Ltd's fifth studio album was defiantly anodyne, with each version titled to reflect its format – album, cassette, compact disc. The predominantly typographic packaging was a pastiche of generically branded products manufactured in the early 1980s, similar to those sold at Ralph's US supermarket chain. The concept was applied to other releases from the same period – the 7" single of *Rise* was packaged as "Single", and its 12" called "12 inch Single". A compilation of the band's music videos was titled videos and several promo items were also released, some of which were given away as competition prizes by *Smash Hits* magazine, including mug, badge, keyring and biro.

FOR TALK TALK'S *THE COLOUR OF SPRING*, MARSH DEVISED A SLEEVE COMPOSED OF MOTHS ADORNED WITH SYMBOLIC REFERENCES TO THE ALBUM'S SONGS AND LYRICS

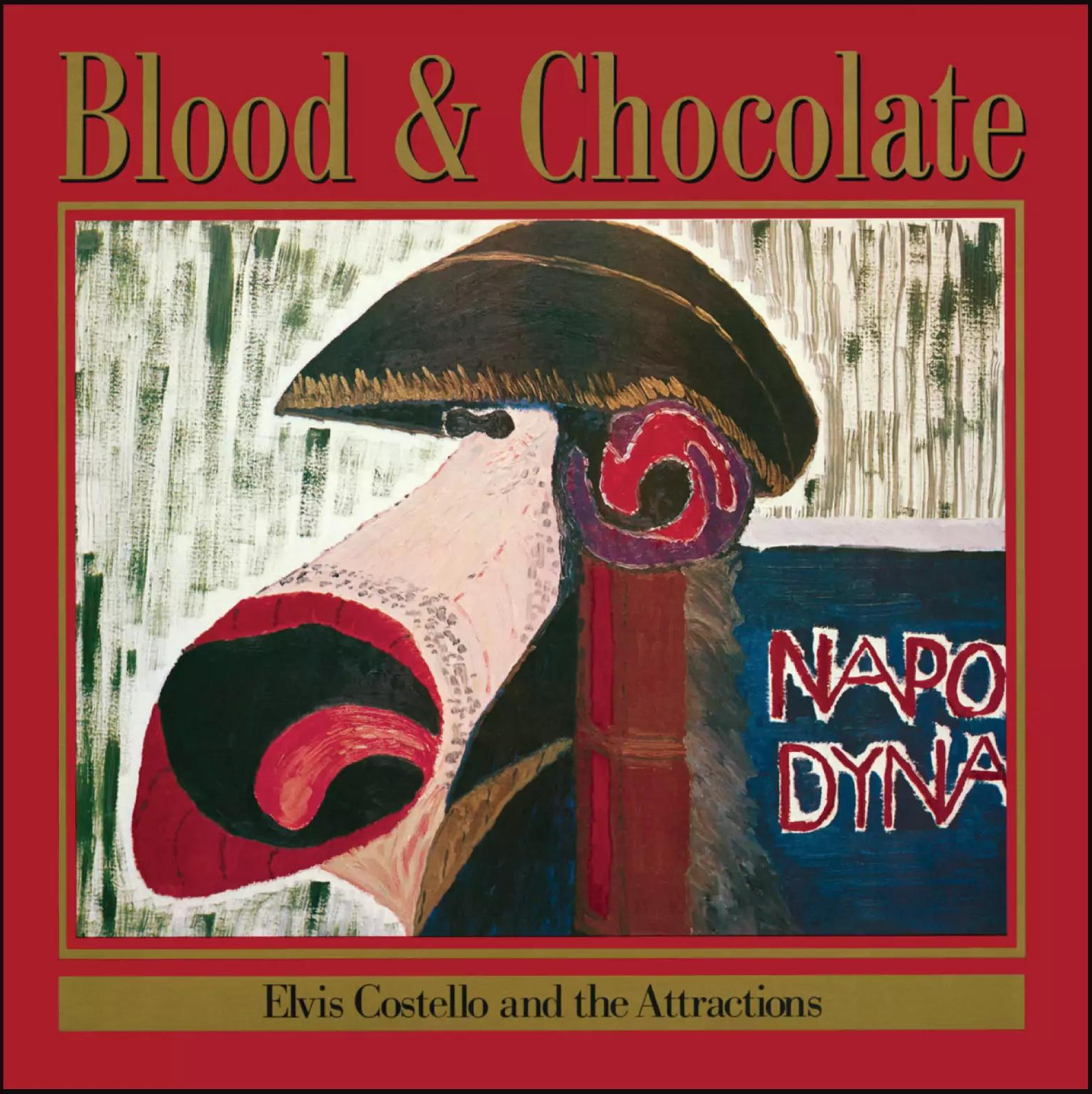

A 21ST CENTURY TOY
FLAUNT IT
見せびらかしましょう
LUXURY DELUX PRODUCTS
最高級デラックス製品
SPUTNIK CITY 1990. THE RULERS OF ROCK & ROLL DEVISED THE ULTIMATE PLAN. THEY WOULD RE-SHAPE THE FUTURE BY CHANGING THE PAST. THE PLAN REQUIRED SOMETHING – THAT FELT NO PITY NO PAIN NO FEAR... SOMETHING UNSTOPPABLE. THEY CREATED SIGUE ★ SIGUE ★ SPUTNIK...
ジグ・ジグ・スパトニック
SIGUE SIGUE
SPUTNIK
A 21ST CENTURY TOY
SPUTNIK WORLD ENTERPRISES

Other bands embraced spectacle, excess and visual noise, pushing sleeves into the realm of pastiche and parody. Bill Smith, art director and graphic designer, worked with Sigue Sigue Sputnik on the design of their much-hyped, debut album, *Flaunt It*, explaining: "Their look and sound was a culture mash-up, mixing hi-tech Japanese influences with the early US punk rock of New York Dolls and futuristic films like *Blade Runner* and *A Clockwork Orange*. They made as much noise as possible, and they always created a stir wherever they pitched up. Exciting, exhilarating and infuriating all at the same time. With the album, *Flaunt It*, we wanted to create box packaging that could have been for a toy Transformer or computer game, and commissioned Bill Bolland, who drew for Judge Dredd comics, to create the cover image. We used Japanese type and threw in everything, including the kitchen sink, layers upon layers of photos and text, reminiscent of Japanese publishing. Really great fun to work on but they sort of came with a splash and left the same way."

Above: Sigue Sigue Sputnik's Bill Smith-designed sleeve mixed Japanese typography with layered photography

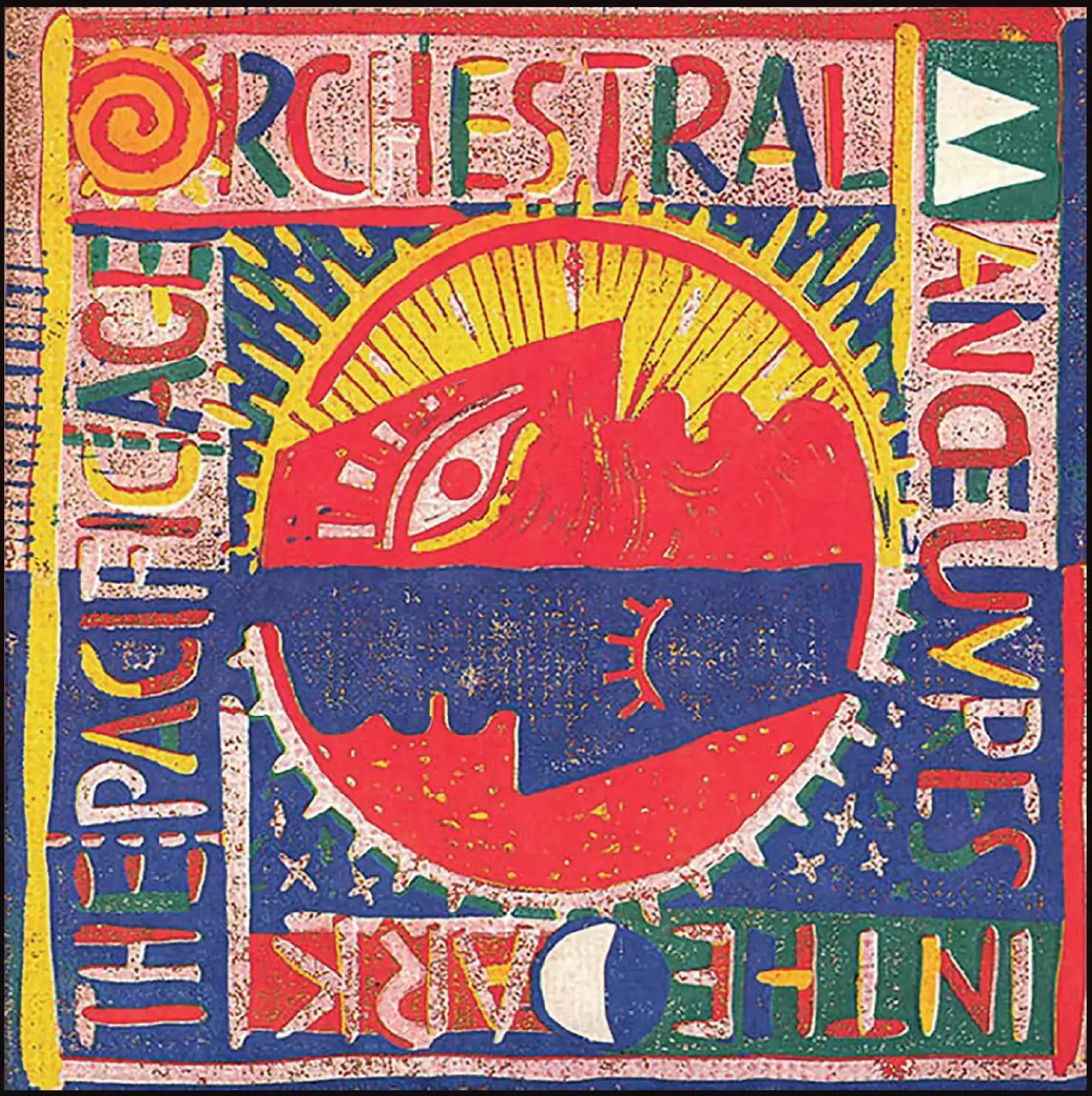
Not every musician outsourced their visual identity. Some preferred to take control, treating the record sleeve as a direct extension of their own artistic voice. Elvis Costello went by multiple monikers around the time of his album *Blood & Chocolate*, including his given name of Declan MacManus, his stage name of Elvis Costello, and the nickname Napoleon Dynamite. The cover art for the album, whilst it was credited to

> "WITH THE ALBUM *FLAUNT IT*, WE WANTED TO CREATE BOX PACKAGING THAT COULD HAVE BEEN FOR A TOY TRANSFORMER OR COMPUTER GAME"
>
> BILL SMITH


Blood & Chocolate
NAPO
DYNA
Elvis Costello and the Attractions

Right: Elvis Costello's abstract painting inspired by Cadbury's Bourneville chocolate packaging

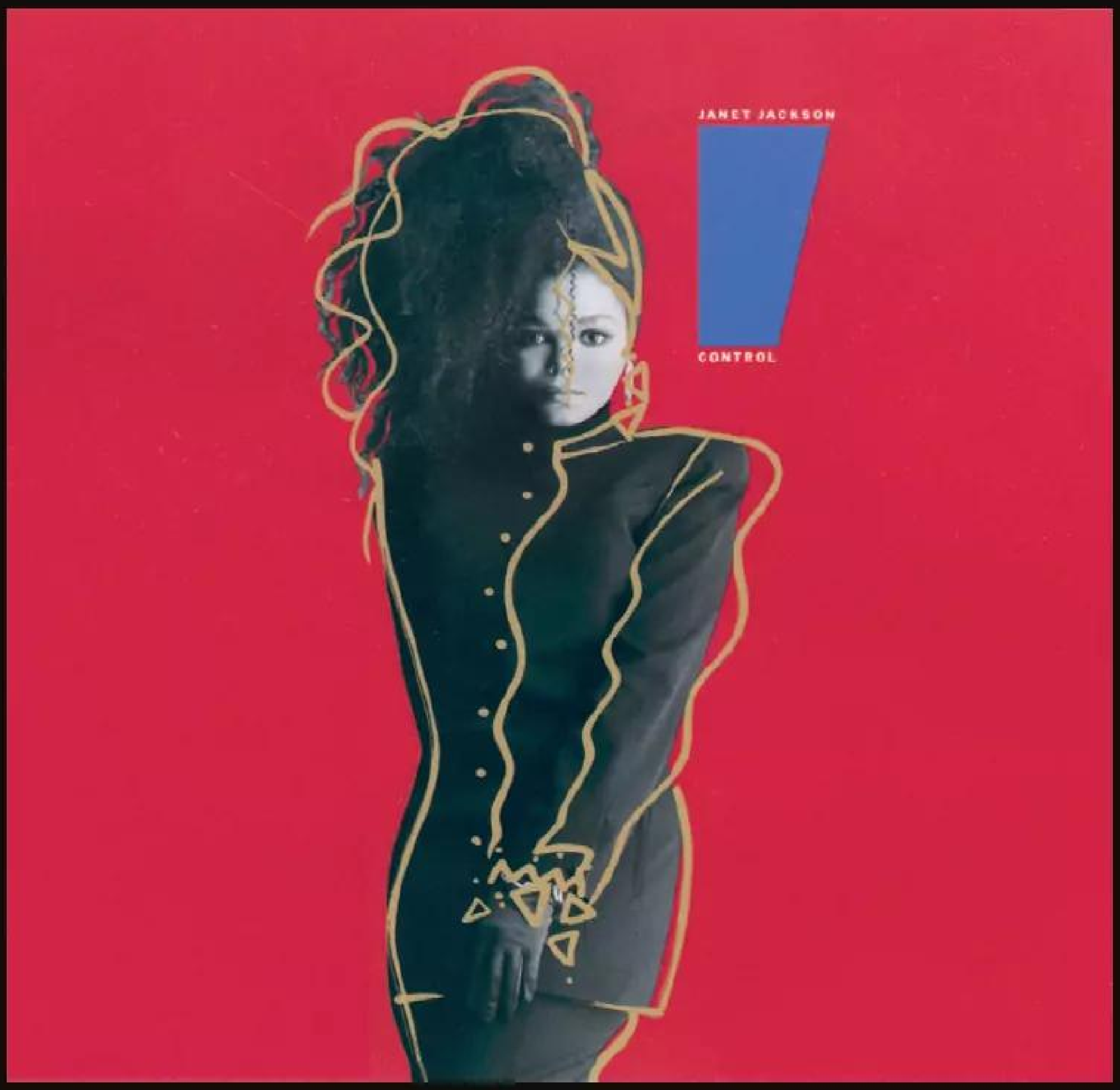
Below: Mick Haggerty used wood and lino prints to create OMD's sleeve for *The Pacific Age*

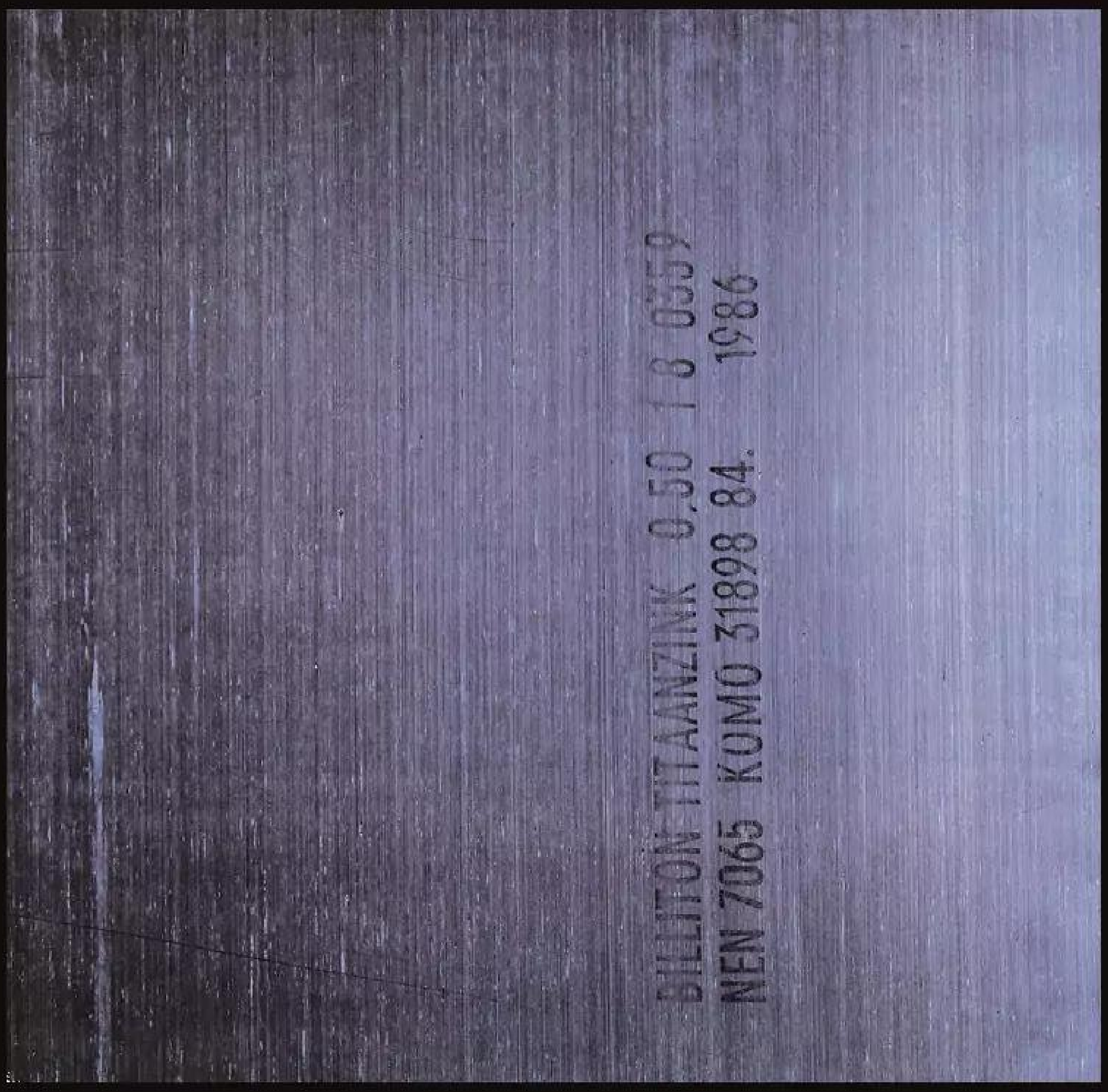

ORCHESTRAL MANOEUVRES IN THE DARK
THE PACIFIC AGE

Eamonn Singer was also the work of Costello. "I painted another daub for the cover of the record," explained Costello, "a tyrant with a face resembling a cold pork chop in a tricorn hat, screaming at a broken chocolate bar full of blood or Turkish Delight, it was hard to tell. After all, I wasn't that adept with the brush" The sleeve's distinctive red and gold colour palette was inspired by Cadbury's Bournville chocolate and for a short period, a limited edition cassette version of the album was also available in mock Cadbury's Bournville packaging, before being withdrawn following complaints from the chocolate company.

The award-winning and much in demand designer/art director, Mick Haggerty, was commissioned to give OMD's seventh studio album *The Pacific Age* a whole new visual identity, explaining: "When OMD contacted me, I was going to say no. How crazy would I have to be to go anywhere near the amazing Peter Saville? I'd just returned from travelling around the Baja Peninsula, taking pictures and making woodcuts. When the band told me the album title was based on the concept that the Northern European Age was closing and the countries of the East and South were waking up, I realised all I had to do was clear off my deck, start cutting wood and lino, and keep printing. In retrospect, I love the synchronicity that produced these images, and the clash its handmade quality makes with the beautiful cerebral coolness of their previous covers."

Below: Fashion photographer/illustrator Tony Viramontes' striking sleeve design for Janet Jackson's *Control* LP

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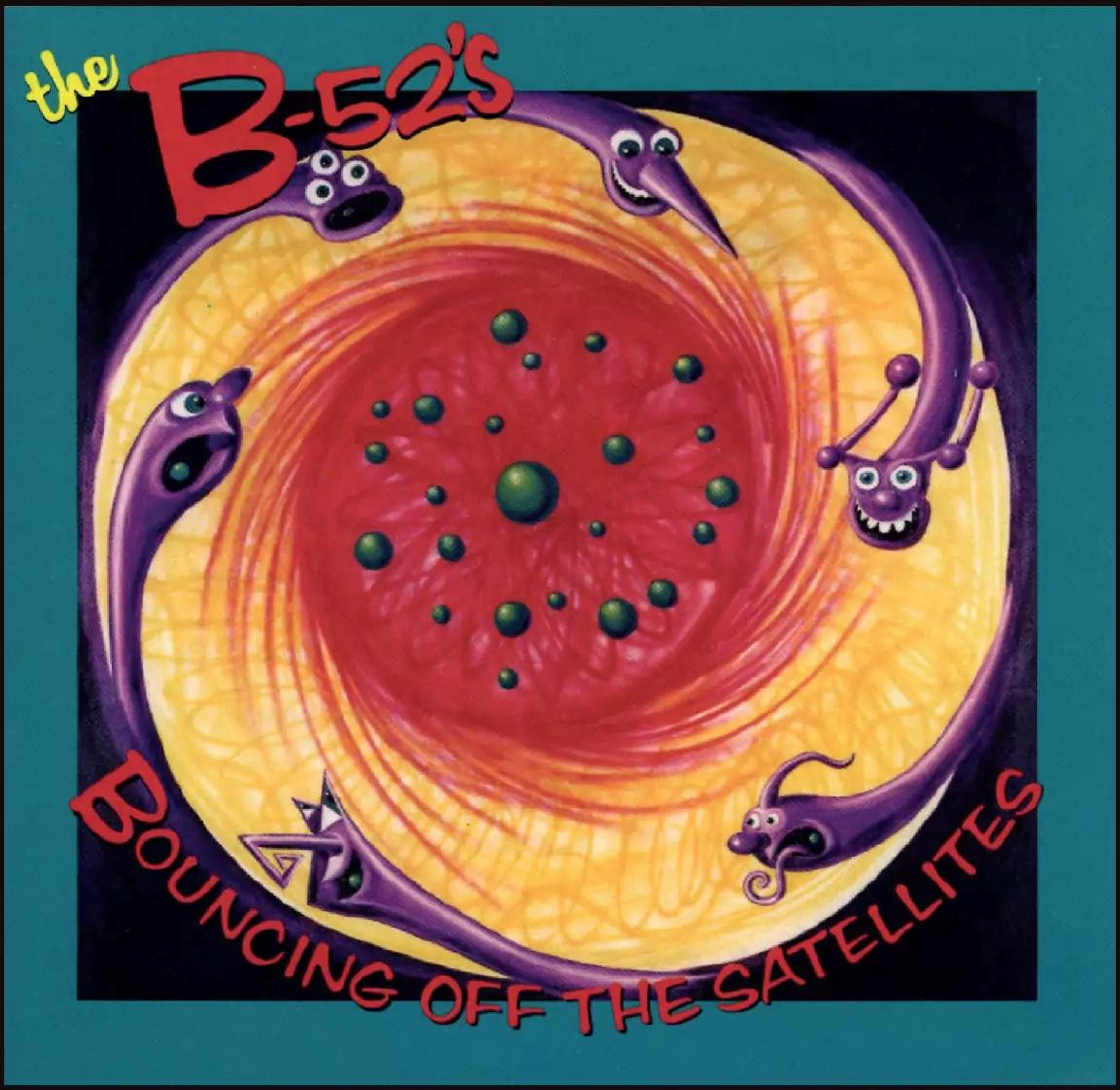
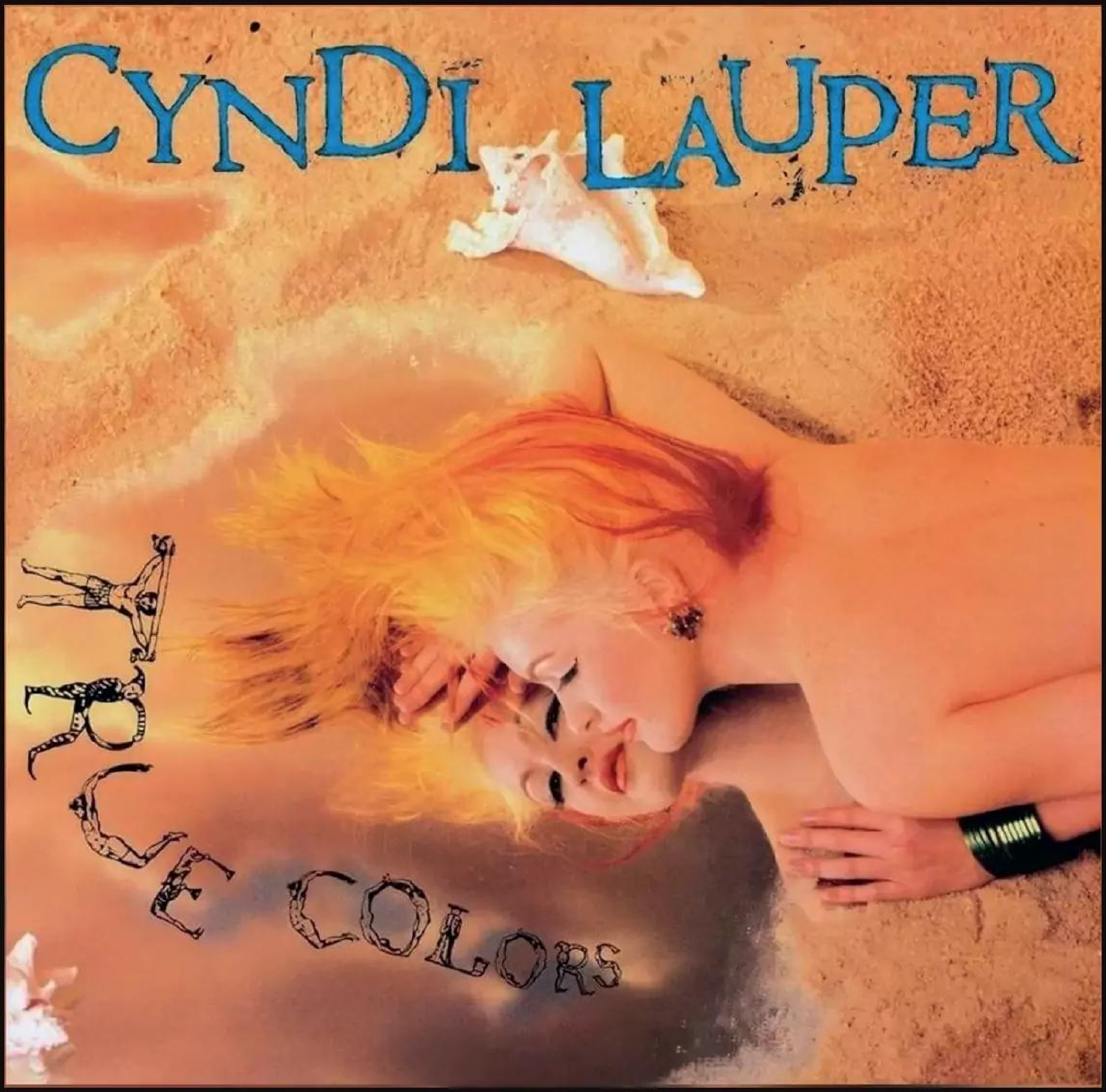


Above: For The B-52's fourth album, Kenny Scharf combined pop culture with the energy of the streets

Left: Peter Saville's titanium-zinc alloy design for New Order's *Brotherhood* LP

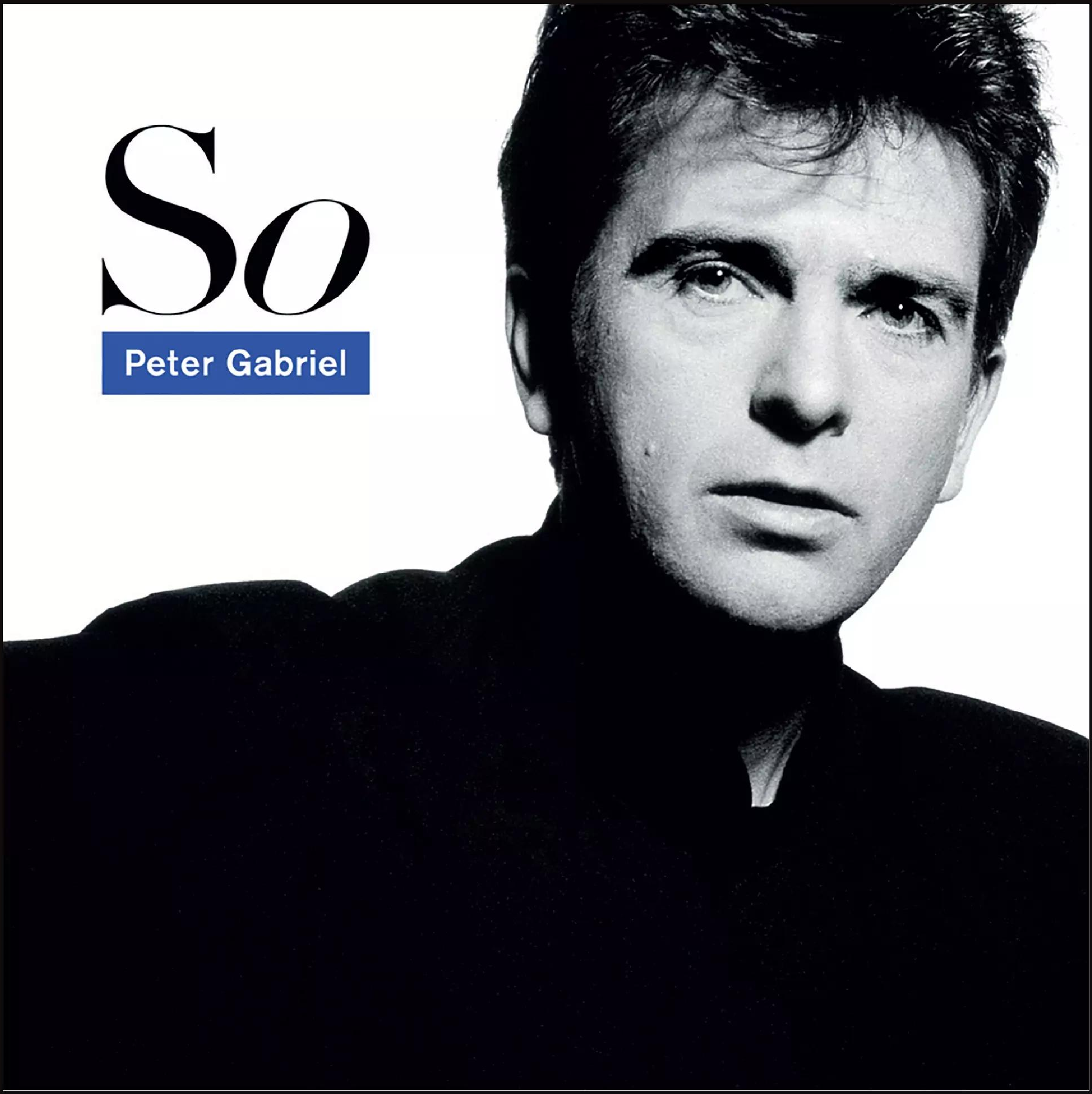
Below: Cyndi Lauper's *True Colors* sleeve was a collaboration with American portrait photographer Annie Leibovitz



The same year also saw striking contributions from the world of fashion illustration. Tony Viramontes designed the cover artwork for Janet Jackson's third studio album, *Control*. Reflecting on their collaboration, Janet, 'Miss Jackson if you're nasty' recalled: "He was very creative, and I believe one day his work will be iconic. He was such a joy to work with. I miss him." In *Bold, Beautiful and Damned: The World Of Fashion Illustrator Tony Viramontes*, author Dean Rhys Morgan further described how Viramontes' imagery helped redefine Jackson's public persona: "She was transformed from a former child star into an assured, fashion-forward figure with her trendsetting big hair and severe all-black ensemble. Until this point, Jackson had been more a reflection than a pioneer, more interpreter than innovator. This album was all about Janet and who she wanted to be." Viramontes' career was tragically cut short when he died a couple of years later, aged just 31, from an AIDS-related illness.

The cover of The B-52's their fourth studio album, *Bouncing Off The Satellites* was created by the American painter Kenny Scharf, who was closely connected to the East Village art scene of New York in the 1980s. Scharf was a contemporary and friend of the artists Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat, and like them, he combined pop culture references with street-influenced energy. His style is described as 'pop-surrealism' or 'cartoon expressionism' – brightly coloured, cosmic, humorous, and a little unsettling, with imagery borrowed from 1950s sci-fi, cartoons, kitsch, and consumer culture. His art complements The B-52's quirky, space-age, camp aesthetic. It situates the band within a kitsch, retro-futurist universe, very much in line with their fascination for thrift-store Americana, sci-fi, and surreal humour.

Cyndi Lauper's second studio album, *True Colors*, meanwhile, balanced restraint with theatricality. Lauper oversaw art direction herself, working with acclaimed photographer Annie Leibovitz on a close-up, emotive portrait that mirrored the album's themes



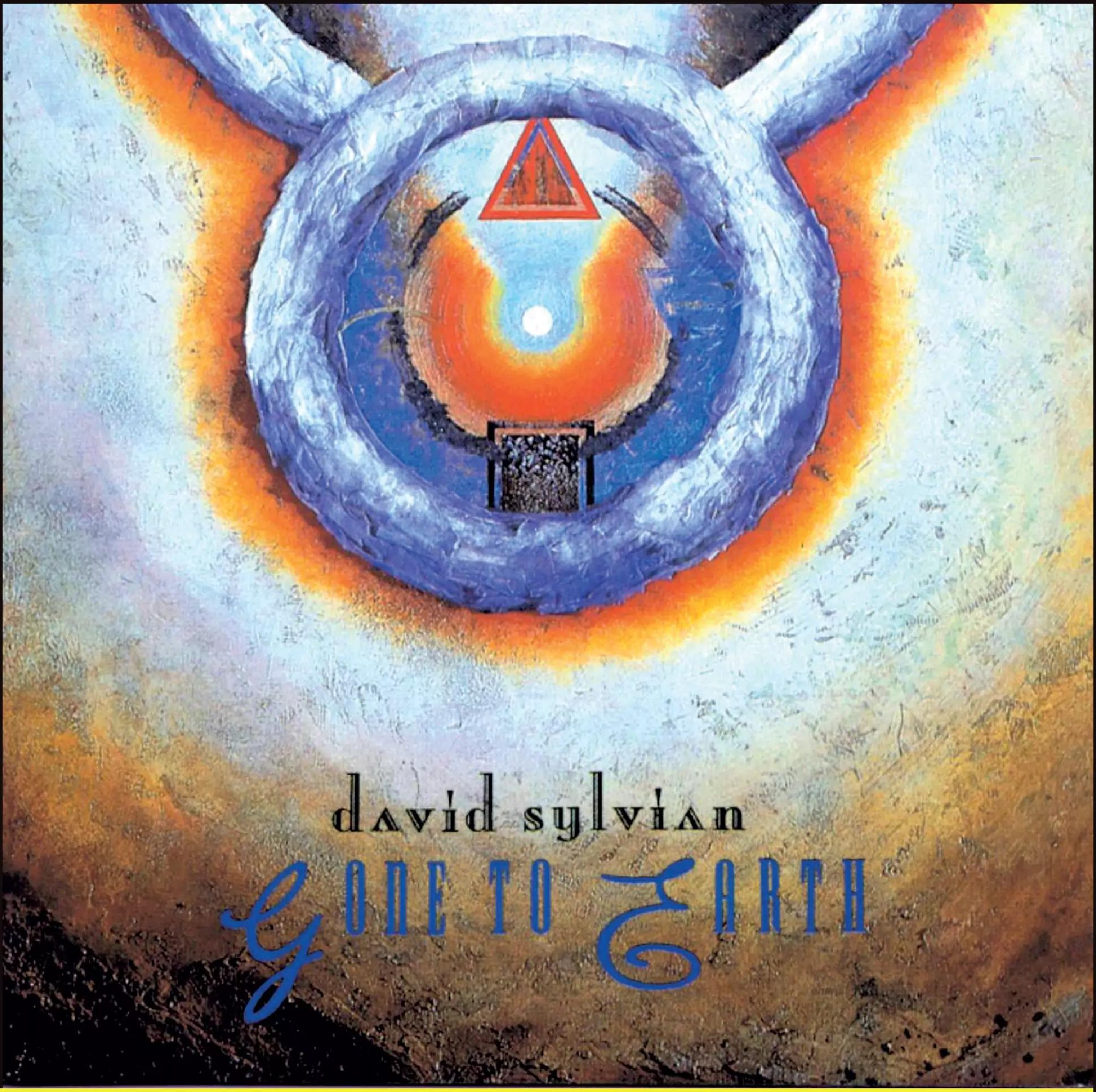
of authenticity and self-expression. The image may be read as a visual homage to a still of Jean Marais from Jean Cocteau's 1950 film Orphée, the same still that The Smiths had used three years earlier for the sleeve of their single, *This Charming Man*.

New Order's fourth studio LP, *Brotherhood* was housed in a sleeve created by their regular graphic designer, Peter Saville. The cover features a textured image of a sheet of titanium-zinc alloy, sourced and photographed by Trevor Key specifically for the project. This understated, industrial visual treatment epitomises what Saville has described as his 'essentialist' design period. Rather than showing the band, pure typography, appropriating another classic painting, or employing illustrative imagery, as he'd done previously, the design relies on materiality, surface and finish as its primary visual theme. In this, it echoes the reductivist spirit of Yves Klein's 1950s monochromes, which explored concepts of void and nothingness, themes that Saville would explore in the 1980s.

Saville and Key also worked on the design of Peter Gabriel's *So* album, where they revisited visual themes explored for *Low-Life*, another New Order album from a year earlier. The use of Polaroid roll film provided a raw, cinematic texture to the black-and-white image, presenting Gabriel as modern and mature – a visual match for the album's broad musical reach. Initially, the plan was for the front cover to be devoid of text, but the record label was insistent,

Above: Peter Saville and Trevor Key's polaroid image for Peter Gabriel's *So* and its Yves Klein-referencing blue rectangle

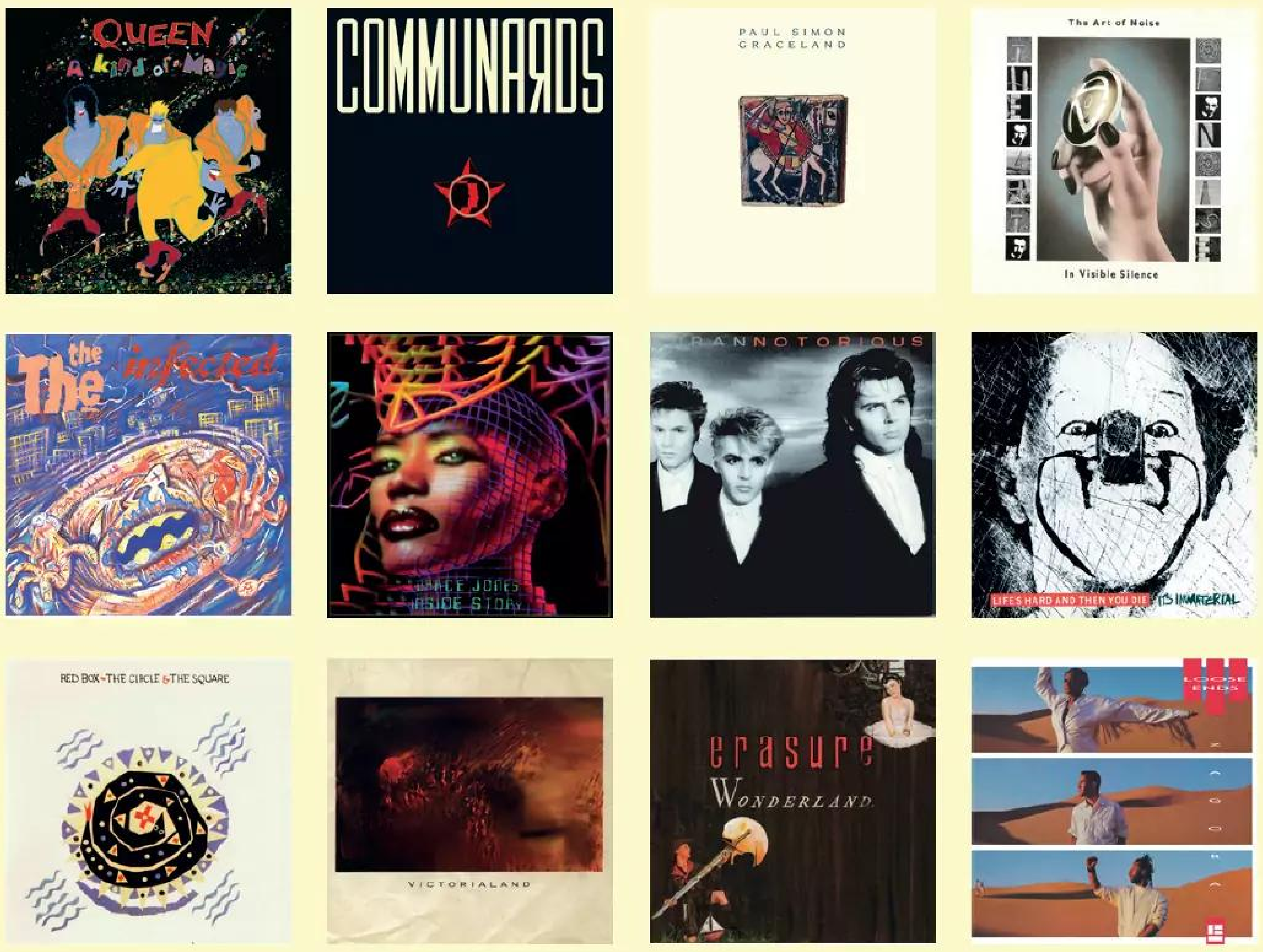
> THE USE OF POLAROID ROLL FILM PROVIDED A RAW, CINEMATIC TEXTURE TO THE BLACK-AND-WHITE IMAGE, PRESENTING GABRIEL AS MODERN AND MATURE


david sylvian
GONE TO EARTH

HONOURABLE MENTIONS

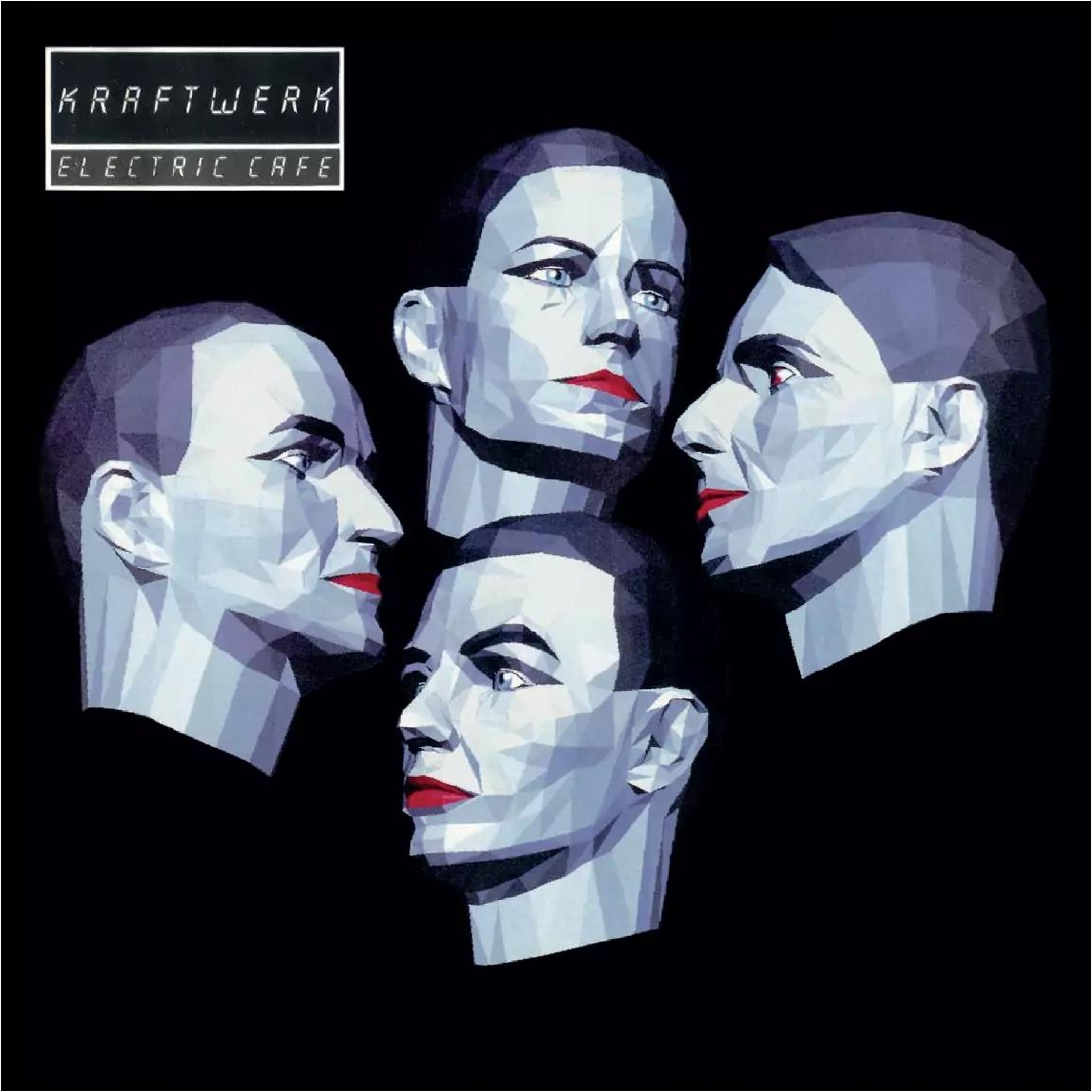
Picking standout sleeves from such a creative year in pop is no easy feat. With so many striking designs and bold artistic statements, some worthy contenders are bound to miss the cut. Even so, here are a dozen more that deserve their moment in the spotlight. Each one is a reminder that the artwork was every bit as vital as the sound itself.

- ***A Kind of Magic*** Queen
- ***Communards*** Communards
- ***Graceland*** Paul Simon
- ***In Visible Silence*** Art of Noise
- ***Infected*** The The
- ***Inside Story*** Grace Jones
- ***Notorious*** Duran Duran
- ***Life's Hard And Then You Die*** It's Immaterial
- ***The Circle And The Square*** Red Box
- ***Victorialand*** Cocteau Twins
- ***Wonderland*** Erasure
- ***Zagora*** Loose Ends


QUEEN
A Kind of Magic
COMMUNARDS
PAUL SIMON
GRACELAND
The Art of Noise
In Visible Silence
the The
infected
GRACE JONES
INSIDE STORY
DURAN DURAN NOTORIOUS
LIFE'S HARD AND THEN YOU DIE
IT'S IMMATERIAL
RED BOX · THE CIRCLE & THE SQUARE
VICTORIALAND
erasure
WONDERLAND

> “[ROBERT FLUDD] DID THESE KIND OF GEOMETRIC DESIGNS OF HEAVEN AND EARTH, AND THAT’S WHERE THE ORIGINAL DESIGN CAME FROM”
>
> **DAVID SYLVIAN**

pet shop boys
please



Facing page: David Sylvian’s *Gone To Earth* LP with artwork inspired by English philosopher Robert Fludd

Above: Mark Farrow’s ‘anti-sleeve’ for Pet Shop Boy’s debut album *Please*

Below: Kraftwerk’s *Electric Café* sleeve, designed by digital artist Rebecca Allen

which led to the late inclusion of a bold ‘So’ rendered in Didot Italic, set above the artist’s name in a deep blue rectangle, another subtle reference to the artist Yves Klein. This combination of imagery and type created an instantly iconic album brand.

Some musicians sought inspiration from far older sources. The sleeve for *Gone To Earth* by David Sylvian was inspired by the work of English philosopher, mathematician and cosmologist Robert Fludd (1574–1637). Fludd’s theories drew upon Christian theology, the ideas of Greek philosophers, and the esoteric beliefs of alchemists and Rosicrucians. David Sylvian: “He did these kind of geometric designs of heaven and earth, and that’s where the original design came from, the two circles. I showed this to the artist Russell Mills and said I wanted to base the cover on this picture. I came to his studio bearing books ripe with illustrations that I felt might work as an interesting starting point for the cover art or discussion thereof. Codex Rosae Crucis was one volume I remember bringing, and the graphics of Robert Fludd another. They had a clear influence on the nature of the finished work. Russell Mills digested these elements, appropriated them, made them part of his own vocabulary.”

Pet Shop Boys’ debut album *Please* offered a visual language built on absence. With its tiny central photograph surrounded by a field of white, it stood out as an anti-sleeve, rejecting the excess of 1980s pop. Mark Farrow, the cover’s designer, wanted to create a record cover that didn’t look like one, and he succeeded. The sleeve couldn’t have been more different to its hyper-saturated chart competition and stood out for being the antithesis of much sleeve design of the 1980s. Neil Tennant: We were creating images that were intentionally un-pop – some imagery around the first album, for instance, was actually quite bleak. It’s mostly black-and-white. We wanted, and still want, to look totally different to everyone else.” Tom Watkins, the duo’s manager at the time, had more complex creative aspirations: “…a big fold-out lattice-work cover, opening out into a crucifix that contained all the mean and moody images they had created over the last couple of years. I excitedly folded the cardboard out in front of them, knowing they were going to just love it. An awkward silence ensued. Neil and Chris mumbled a few words with an overwhelming air of indifference.” Interestingly, elements of this abandoned idea were partly implemented in the design of the fold-out promo version of the album.

Finally, Kraftwerk’s *Electric Café* really did point towards the future. New York-based digital artist Rebecca Allen created polygonal 3D models of the band members by hand-mapping grids of tape onto models of the band’s faces, photographing them, and entering the data, point by point into a computer. The resulting figures were at once crude and futuristic. By embracing the jaggedness of early digital graphics rather than smoothing it away, Allen defined a new aesthetic that resonated perfectly with Kraftwerk’s ethos of precision, experimentation and technological progress. Both the album sleeve and its groundbreaking promotional video for *Musique Non Stop* became landmark works of digital art, fusing sound, vision and identity in ways that would ripple across the rest of the decade. ■

Previously known only for small TV roles and as the youngest Jackson sibling, *Control* made Janet a star

© Getty

NEVER GONNA STOP

EMERGING FROM THE SHADOW OF HER BIG BROTHERS, JANET'S THIRD ALBUM SAW HER PRESENT A SET OF ANTHEMS ON WHICH SHE DISPLAYED INDEPENDENCE, STRENGTH AND SELF-WORTH. ENFORCED BY JAM AND LEWIS' PRISTINE, CUTTING-EDGE PRODUCTION, *CONTROL* ESTABLISHED MISS JACKSON AS A STAR IN HER OWN RIGHT.

MARK LINDORES

The year 2019 saw Janet Jackson's career undergo something of a major reappraisal thanks to an induction into the Rock & Roll Hall Of Fame, a Las Vegas residency, a Glastonbury performance and a vinyl reissue of her most successful albums, giving long overdue credit to a woman whose legacy has been unfairly overshadowed during the past two decades by the Super Bowl and sibling scandals.

While the consensus from retrospective reassessment of her work has deemed 1989's social commentary *Janet Jackson's Rhythm Nation 1814* her magnum opus, Janet wouldn't have been qualified to address the state of the world had she not got her own house in order first, which is exactly what she did on 1986 breakthrough, *Control*.

Although she had kicked off her music career at the insistence of her father/manager Joe Jackson four years earlier (her eponymous debut album was released two weeks before her brother unleashed the biggest-selling album of all time), her first two records were unremarkable, indistinct and unsuccessful, leaving Janet still known primarily as a television actress from shows such as *Good Times, Diff'rent Strokes* and *Fame*, and as the youngest member of pop's royal family rather than for her musical output.

That was all to change in 1985 when Jackson, having eloped with singer James DeBarge a year earlier, annulled the problematic marriage (allegedly due to his voracious drug habit), and took stock of her life and career to establish herself as successful recording artist in her own right. The *Janet Jackson* and *Dream Street* albums had proven that the public wouldn't shell out for something just because it had her name on the front, so Janet was intent on creating her own sound and identity.

It was the brainchild of John McClain, A&R executive of A&M Records, to team Jackson with Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis. The duo had previously been members of Prince protégés The Time and had gone on to achieve great success writing and producing hits for the SOS Band, Alexander O'Neal and Cherrelle among others. They had originally been scheduled to work with former Atlantic Starr singer Sharon Bryant, but when that failed to happen, were offered any other artist from the A&M roster by way of recompense. They chose Janet. "Nobody was checking for Janet at that point," Jimmy Jam later explained to Red Bull Music Academy. "We just felt something. First of all, she had talent. She had a great voice, but she also had a great attitude and we thought that the attitude was never being brought out of her. We thought as producers and writers, we could do that."

Jam & Lewis met with Jackson, her dad Joe and label bosses to play them their previous record, the strings-laden *The Heat Of Heat* by Patti Austin, a collaboration with Quincy Jones. Janet baulked at the idea of using strings on her songs while Joe Jackson was concerned that the pair would douse Janet in the 'Minneapolis Sound' and make her sound too much like Prince.

Although Jackson was excited by the opportunity to be working with Jam and Lewis – she had been a big fan of The Time and had seen them in concert when she was 15 years old – she wanted to make her album in L.A. Jimmy and Terry refused on the basis that they always made their records in their own Flyte Tyme Studios. Realising that the message she wanted to convey was that of growing up and doing things without the help of her family, Janet agreed to swap the sun and security of the Jackson estate in California for the cooler climes of Minneapolis, an experience which turned out to be something of a culture shock for the sheltered superstar.

Arriving in Minneapolis with eight suitcases and her best friend Melanie, Jackson's first surprise came when she was met at the airport, not by the expected limousine, but by a rental car Jam and Lewis had arranged for her. Forced to be self-sufficient, Janet relished the challenge and rose to it. "She came to Minneapolis, no bodyguards, no nothing… she brought a friend of hers, Melanie," Jimmy recalled to RBMA. "We required that they put her in our hands, far from the glitter and distractions of Hollywood and the interference of manager/fathers. We rented her a car – a little Chevy Blazer – and she had to find her own way around; this was before GPS. There were maps and all kinds of Stone Age stuff, and she had to find her way to the studio, the hotel, all those kinds of things. It had to be on our turf, with no bodyguards, no star trips and none of Joe Jackson's people hanging around making suggestions."

"They told me that they didn't want me to have somebody doing everything for me and I told them that that wasn't how I lived anyway," Janet later told *Rolling Stone*. "I told them my whole story, what I wanted to do. I spoke about things that happened in my life and what I really wanted this album to be about. I said, 'I need you guys to help me express how I feel, to help me put my feelings out.'"

For the first four or five days after they'd met, Jackson merely hung out with Jam & Lewis, taking in movies, clubs and going to a nearby lake. She seemed surprised that they hadn't started with the recording sessions only to be shown the lyrics to *Control* – Jam & Lewis had been gathering information by getting to know her.

"It was like a lightbulb went off in her head because nobody had ever asked her what she wanted to write about, or sing about," Jam later explained. "Nobody had asked her to write, they just gave her songs. We were like, 'No, no, you got to be part of the process here.'"

As the trio began working on the album as a team, the experience was both cathartic and confidence building for Jackson. One experience, in which she and her friend Melanie were accosted by a group of men making lewd comments before being told, in no uncertain terms, to back off by Janet, was the inspiration for one of the album's key tracks. "When she came back and told

> "SHE CAME TO MINNEAPOLIS, NO BODYGUARDS, NO NOTHING… SHE BROUGHT A FRIEND, MELANIE"
>
> **JIMMY JAM**

TRACK BY TRACK

① CONTROL

Throughout her career, Jackson has maintained that if anyone wants to know what's going on in her life, they just need to listen to her music, since her albums are diaries or snapshots of her life at any given time. Never has that been more true than on *Control*. The title track tells it *exactly* how it was. "When I was 17 I did what people told me/ Did what my father said and let my mother mould me/ But that was long ago I'm in control", she sang, before firing her father Joe as her manager.Although Joe had maintained to Jam & Lewis that he didn't want the album to sound like Prince, the funky dance track, with its *Let's Go Crazy*-esque spoken intro and synths prominent in the mix, would not have sounded out of place in one of *Purple Rain*'s club scenes.

② NASTY

One of the most innovative tracks of its time, *Nasty* saw Jam & Lewis perfect the art of noise, coming up with an aggressive groove which encompassed pop, hip-hop, R&B and funk with innovative clicks and synths to inadvertently birth the genre which was to become known as New Jack Swing. Inspired by an incident where Janet and her friend had been confronted by a sexually aggressive group of men in Minneapolis, her lyric became a modern-day echo of Aretha Franklin's demand for R-E-S-P-E-C-T, as well as an 80s anthem of female empowerment.

③ WHAT HAVE YOU DONE FOR ME LATELY

Incredibly, *What Have You Done For Me Lately* was not on the original album tracklisting and was added at the last minute only after A&M requested one more radio-friendly, uptempo track at the label's LP listening party. Jam & Lewis had already written and recorded the music for their own album, but suggested Janet write to it for the final addition to the record. The result is a biting riposte to Janet's ex-husband James DeBarge and sung from the viewpoint of a frustrated woman unhappy at being taken advantage of by her partner. "It really changed a whole lot of things," Jam told *Rolling Stone*. "The only way to get on pop radio if you were a black artist was basically to put a ballad out – so we made a sassy record. Now, all of a sudden, you have this aggressive, hard-hitting female singing. It changed the way radio sounded." The track was Janet's breakthrough hit, reaching the Top 10 around the world, including the US and UK.

④ YOU CAN BE MINE

You Can Be Mine suffers by its placement on the album, given the unenviable task of following the incredibly strong and powerful opening triumvirate of *Control*, *Nasty* and *What Have You Done For Me Lately*. Inferior to its predecessors, the track is saved by Jam & Lewis' backing track, which is similar to the style they deploy much more successfully on *When I Think Of You*. A screaming guitar solo

JANET JACKSON
CONTROL
1
CONTROL
NASTY
WHAT HAVE YOU DONE FOR ME LATELY
YOU CAN BE MINE
2
THE PLEASURE PRINCIPLE
WHEN I THINK OF YOU
HE DOESN'T KNOW I'M ALIVE
LET'S WAIT AWHILE
FUNNY HOW TIME FLIES (WHEN YOU'RE HAVING FUN)
A&M

Fashion photographer Tony Viramontes' stunning sleeve artwork for *Control*

from Jellybean Johnson hinted at Janet's later flirtations with rock such as *Black Cat*.

5 THE PLEASURE PRINCIPLE

One of Janet's finest dance songs, *The Pleasure Principle* hints at how it would have sounded if Prince had partied at Paradise Garage. Penned by The Time's Monte Moir, the track is steeped in the funky sounds of the Minneapolis club circuit, with a prominent synth line over a groove that evoked a futuristic take on Shannon's classic *Let The Music Play*. Although Janet didn't write on this song, its lyric was inspired by her short-lived marriage and how it was based on shallow materialism, leaving her unfulfilled.

6 WHEN I THINK OF YOU

When Janet completed work on *Control* and returned home to play it to her family, Jermaine Jackson singled out *When I Think Of You* as the big hit from the album, predicting it would be a No.1. Fast forward to the summer of 1986 and he was proven right when it was released as the album's third single and gave Janet her first US chart-topper. It was also the catalyst for *Control* reaching the top spot six months after it was released. Structurally, the song is unusual in the way it builds. Beginning with a simple piano, every bar sees the introduction of another layer of instrumentation – bass, drums, brass – before Janet's vocal over a minute into the song.

7 HE DOESN'T KNOW I'M ALIVE

Overlooked only because of the huge tracks which accompany it on the all killer, no filler album, *He Doesn't Know That I'm Alive* is the kind of song that was keeping Five Star in the upper reaches of the chart in 1986. In 2011, Blood Orange's Dev Hynes and Solange Knowles reimagined it as a slinky slow jam for his *Home Recordings Mixtape*.

8 LET'S WAIT AWHILE

One of Janet's greatest ballads, *Let's Wait Awhile* was written by Jimmy, Terry, Janet and her friend Melanie and inspired by the latter's predicament at the time where she was unsure if she wanted to have sex with her boyfriend. "I connected that song to millions of young people who might need encouragement to think rather than act, to pause rather than move," Jimmy Jam explained in Janet's book *True You*. "The theme of the song was Janet's idea. She's not a preachy person. She's not telling people how to live their lives. All she's doing is offering an opinion." Even outside the music press, the song was also applauded for its message of abstinence at a time when cases of HIV/AIDS were rising at an alarming rate.

9 FUNNY HOW TIME FLIES (WHEN YOU'RE HAVING FUN)

A sensual slow jam to close the album, *Funny How Time Flies* is the blueprint for what Jackson would later call her "baby making songs" after fans told her how they played her music when they had sex. As Janet's career progressed and she made these particular tracks more explicit (*Warmth* or *Moist* anyone?!), they ironically became much less sexy. *Funny How Time Flies* was released in the UK as the seventh and final single from *Control*.

us the story, we played a track we had come up with which we felt would fit the narrative – aggressive and feisty, and that's where *Nasty* came from," Lewis told RBMA.

With Janet as their muse, Jam & Lewis found themselves pushing themselves further, creating increasingly more daring and experimental music to accompany her powerful lyrics depicting what it was to be a young black woman in mid-80s America. Though she was a member of the country's most famous musical family, the themes of craving independence, respect and power were universal.

In hindsight, despite the plaudits, Jam & Lewis' glistening production on *Control* tracks such as *Nasty* still remains underappreciated. Every bit as innovative as what avant-garde acts such as The Art Of Noise was doing at the time, it was perhaps overlooked due to its fusion with pop harmonies.

That particular issue was raised when Janet, Jimmy and Terry attended a playback session for A&M and John McClain to play him the results of their six-week Minneapolis sojourn. Feeling that *Control* – a six-minute, choppy dance track with vocal effects or the hip-hop/pop hybrid *Nasty* were a little too aggressive sounding for consideration for the lead single, the label requested two more mainstream tracks, one of which was *What Have You Done For Me Lately.*

The song turned out to be exactly what the label and the public were looking for, and became Jackson's first Top 10 hit in January 1986 – the first of a record-breaking run of singles taken from the album. A further six hits followed (including her first US No.1 single *When I Think Of You*) as well as *Diamonds*, a Jam & Lewis-produced collaboration with Herb Alpert, which made Jackson a constant presence on the charts for the next 18 months.

The album itself, released in February 1986, debuted at a disappointing No.84 but climbed the chart steadily as each single was released, reaching the top spot of the US album chart that summer and going on to sell more than 10 million copies worldwide. Its run in the UK was more complicated and it wasn't until a year later that it reached its peak position of No.8, following an exhaustive promo tour which saw Janet appear on everything from *The Tube* to *Saturday Superstore.*

With its iconic sleeve artwork from fashion photographer and illustrator Tony Viramontes, a string of ground-breaking videos which helped establish MTV as a prominent force in music, and an accompanying remix album, *Control* still stands up today as a statement of independence, self-respect, strength and power, not only for Miss Jackson herself, but for the myriad artists who have danced in her immaculately choreographed footsteps in the ensuing three decades.

> "NOBODY HAD ASKED HER TO WRITE, THEY JUST GAVE HER SONGS. WE WERE LIKE, 'NO, NO, YOU GOT TO BE PART OF THE PROCESS HERE'"
>
> **JIMMY JAM**

CAMERA CONTROL

NASTY
Although Brian Jones and Piers Ashworth were originally hired to direct the *What Have You Done For Me Lately* and *Nasty* videos, Jackson was underwhelmed with how the former turned out, feeling it lacked the gutsy attitude she wanted to come across from the song. For *Nasty,* she hired Mary Lambert on the condition that she was allowed her own input. Again choreographed by – and including a cameo from – Paula Abdul, *Nasty* encapsulated the tough, feisty Janet of the song, forcing the 'Nasty Boys' to back down.

WHEN I THINK OF YOU
A love letter to the classic MGM Hollywood musical, *When I Think Of You* saw Janet realising one of her dreams by starring in her own. She got the idea after falling in love with Julien Temple's *Absolute Beginners* movie, so asked him to direct, stating he was the only person who could bring her cinematic vision to life and that she'd scrap the whole concept if he couldn't do it. He could and he did, with the result being one of Janet's most vibrant promos as legendary choreographer Michael Kidd assisted Paula Abdul.

LET'S WAIT AWHILE
Having released a live performance promo video for *Control,* Jackson followed it with a narrative-led clip for *Let's Wait Awhile.* Shot mainly on a New York rooftop in sub-zero temperatures, the video depicts a seemingly perfect relationship between Janet and her boyfriend, played by martial arts actor Taimak Guarriello. The promo continues the album's message of empowerment by showing Jackson refusing to succumb to pressure from her lover but promising at the end to be "worth the wait".

THE PLEASURE PRINCIPLE
The final video from *Control* is one of the most influential of all time due to its innovative depiction of dance. Taking place inside a huge Manhattan loft, *The Pleasure Principle* sees a solo Janet perfectly executing Barry Lather's intricate choreography. Here performing without back-up dancers for the first time, it was a prospect she found "terrifying" and in her autobiography *True You,* Janet revealed how she'd made herself ill from stress and the crash diet she went on in order to look her best.

© Getty

Jackson hits the promo trail for *Control*, on French TV in 1986

© Getty

THE THE - INFECTED

IN A YEAR'S TIME, *WALL STREET*'S GORDON GEKKO WOULD DECLARE "GREED IS GOOD," BUT IN 1986 MATT JOHNSON WASN'T SO SURE. ACCOMPANIED BY A 'VISUAL COMPANION' 30 YEARS BEFORE BEYONCÉ'S *LEMONADE*, THE THE'S MASTERPIECE'S SCATHING STATE-OF-WESTERN-CIVILISATION ADDRESS IS STILL FRIGHTENINGLY RELEVANT TODAY.

WYNDHAM WALLACE

* * *

It was the year of Chris De Burgh's *Lady In Red*, Nick Berry's *Every Loser Wins*, and Sinitta's *So Macho*. Hair was big, make-up heavy, and shoulder pads were all the rage. For many, these were halcyon days, with Margaret Thatcher heaving Britain out of a recession and Ronald Reagan's trickle-down economics in full swing. But not *everyone* could say yes to another excess. 1986 began inauspiciously with the *Washington Post* reporting, "more people were stricken with AIDS in 1985 than in all of the earlier six years". Days afterwards, the Space Shuttle Challenger exploded. Three months on, the Chernobyl nuclear plant. Sure, Tom Cruise was radiant in Ray-Bans in *Top Gun*, but what did that mean to Britain's three million unemployed, watching it in a "cinema that lies crumbling to the ground" by a "piss-stinking shopping centre"?

These were Matt Johnson's words, taken from *Heartland*, the lead single from The The's *Infected*, which crash-landed into turbulent times on 17 November. It was far from the only provocative tune. Johnson had undertaken, he told Jon Wilde in 1993, "to dissect the symptoms and causes of the decline of the Western empire". Indeed, his first choice for single was the ominous, saxy *Sweet Bird Of Truth* – on which, alongside Anna Domino, he styled himself as "your captain calling with an urgent warning" – until, following the United States' bombing of Libya, its April release was all but pulled because it was too close to the bone.

The album opened with an a cappella chant of the furious title track's central conceit, "Infect me with your love", and with AIDS now affecting 74 countries, this was a bold introduction. Furthermore, Johnson refused throughout to pull his punches, whether personally, politically, or linguistically, railing at his homeland – *Heartland*'s "51st state of the USA", where "pensioners are raped/ And the hearts are being cut from the welfare state" – as well as its closest ally's foreign policy. On the aggressive yet soulful *Angels Of Deception*, the US "stuck (their) missiles in your gardens", while on *Sweet Bird Of Truth*, their fighter jets carried "the wind of change/ Heaven sent, and hell bent" into the Middle East.

MATT JOHNSON REFUSED TO PULL HIS PUNCHES, WHETHER PERSONALLY, POLITICALLY, OR LINGUISTICALLY, RAILING AT HIS HOMELAND

Naturally, capitalism also came in for a clobbering, literally and metaphorically. *Sweet Bird Of Truth* caustically celebrated "all the money I've made, bodies I've maimed", while on the grim, Tom Waits-inspired *Twilight Of A Champion* a "big shot… sits back in his new leather chair/ Ripped off the back of some unfortunate beast." The slinky *Out Of The Blue (Into The Fire)* was even blunter, Johnson "a man without a soul" visiting a prostitute "lying on her back with her lips parted/ Squealing like a stuffed pig". If this was a shocking image, helping provoke John Lydon to decree *Infected* – according to Johnson, anyway – "the most spiteful record he'd heard in years", it was far from gratuitous, instead indicative of a festering anger that The The's mastermind considered justifiable. As the masterful *Heartland*, with future Marillion singer Steve Hogarth on piano, had it, "I'm just a symptom of the moral decay that's gnawing at the heart of the country."

That he delivered this devastating critique while on the multinational CBS Records is *Infected*'s biggest irony and Johnson's finest achievement. Indeed, that he was on the label

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***Infected* included The The's best-selling single *Heartland*, which made No.29 in the UK**

* * *

at all was a coup. Still, it was in keeping with his manager, Some Bizzare head honcho Stevo Pearce's maverick methodology that he'd persuaded the company to offer the man behind 1981's *Blue Burning Soul* – Johnson's first LP, "a breathtaking exposition", according to *Sounds*, "of frustration, isolation, despair and melancholia" – a £40,000 advance and eight-album contract. Johnson, though well-connected, had been knocking around a while – three LPs with The Gadgets, multiple singles and compilation contributions – without sniffing the Top 40, and yet CBS MD Maurice Oberstein was forced to sign their deal atop a Trafalgar Square lion at midnight.

To be fair, his faith was to be repaid. 1983's *Soul Mining*, described by *Creem* as "a lot of fun, especially if you enjoy the sight of someone standing on the ledge of a tall building", achieved Gold status. Oberstein was further vindicated after *Infected*, co-produced by Johnson with Warne Livesey, Roli Mosimann and Gary Langan, charted even higher and dented the US market. When Stevo approached the label, however, with an idea to compensate for Johnson's unwillingness to tour, one assumes CBS were unaware of the circumstances behind the album's making. Certainly, there were additional expenses. "A lot of it was written on vast amounts of cocaine," Johnson told Wilde, "but not all of it. A few of those songs were written on a mixture of ecstasy, speed and vodka".

"I WANTED TO WRITE A CLASSIC SONG WHICH IS BASICALLY REPRESENTATIVE OF ITS TIME," JOHNSON TOLD *NME*

Despite this cautionary tale, Johnson was given an extraordinary £350,000 to make videos for each song. *Heartland* was shot at Greenwich Power Station with director, Hipgnosis' Peter Christopherson, while *Sweet Bird Of Truth* employed Mark Romanek, who'd just released his first movie, *Static*.

But if filming had begun in a – relatively – discreet manner, this didn't last: Johnson and Christopherson soon leapt on a plane to Peru. There, for *Infected*, Johnson was strapped to a boat's roof in the Amazon jungle – a nod to Klaus Kinski's *Fitzcarraldo* – and, for *The Mercy Beat*, he juggled snakes and monkeys, one of which bit him, before the crew were attacked by Communist rebels. "It was amazing we all got back alive," Matt told *Uncut* in 2016. "You can imagine the purity of the coke."

Things were little calmer when Tim Pope accompanied Johnson to New York's Harlem for *Out Of The Blue* and they were abandoned by police while filming in a brothel next to a crackhouse. Even as they wrapped in the UK, they were still inviting trouble, strapping Neneh Cherry – a guest on the sultry *Slow Train To Dawn* after Johnson got her so hammered on vodka she almost fell down a flight of stairs – to railway tracks as Johnson drove an oncoming train. Nevertheless, a month after the album's release, the full film was broadcast on Channel 4, consolidating the success of *Heartland*, which had already spent 10 weeks in the charts. *Infected* lasted 30, achieving, like *Soul Mining*, Gold status.

Heartland, of course, is the album's greatest legacy. "I wanted to write a classic song which is basically representative of its time," Johnson told *NME*, "a record that in 1999 people will put on and it will remind them exactly of this period." He fulfilled his ambition, and then some. After all, "this is the land where nothing changes", and, nearly 40 years later, in post-Brexit Britain – with the Tories in power even longer than Thatcher, food bank use up almost 100 times since they arrived, and corruption apparently endemic at the heart of government – its words resonate as powerfully as ever. "Let the poor drink the milk while the rich eat the honey/ Let the bums count their blessings, while they count their money..."

a-ha
Scoundrel Days

CLASSIC ALBUM

SCOUNDREL DAYS

A-HA

THE SOPHOMORE LONG-PLAYER THAT'S MORE SMASHING PUMPKINS THAN *SMASH HITS*, A-HA'S SECOND ALBUM FOUND ITS PLACE AMIDST DARKER CLIMES

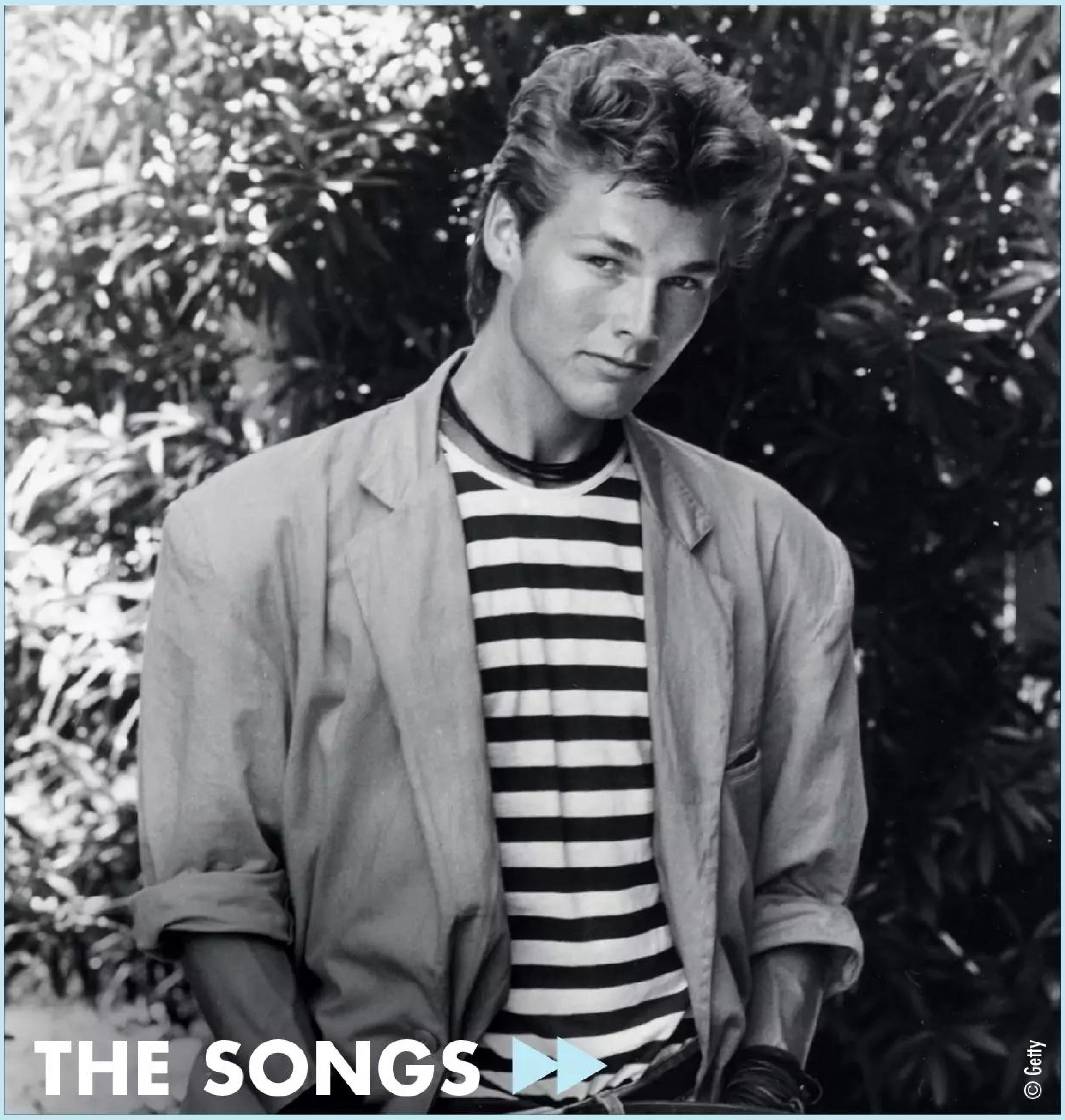
FELIX ROWE

Just how on earth do you follow up *that* song? With the difficult second album. Norway's finest returned with a much darker record – a melodramatic synth-operetta that revealed a more complex and intriguing group than their poster boys image would suggest.

At the risk of stating the bleeding obvious, *Take On Me* is a seriously good pop song. In fact, it's too good; so apparently effortless, immediately accessible and easy on the ear that we tend to overlook quite how sophisticated, intricate and well-crafted it is. It's even simpler to dismiss its instantly hummable hook as mere bubblegum fodder, when delivered by three easy-on-the-eye Nordic cherubs, barely out of their teens. It's so inherently marketable, the cynical might suspect foul play. Only when you stop to analyse its constituent parts (and attempt to hit that note) does the penny finally drop that you're dealing with three heavyweight musos who have really got their shit together. Seriously good pop indeed.

Needless to say, it conquered the world through heavy MTV and radio rotation. The album from which it came, 1985's *Hunting High And Low* was equally ubiquitous, selling by the bucket load and producing another hit, *The Sun Always Shines On TV*. When you've set the bar so high, where do you go from there? That was the very real problem that a-ha had created for themselves. Of course, it's a good problem to have. They were riding a wave of adulation; where they took it next was up to them.

In 1986, singer Morten Harket was interviewed for Australian TV during their first world tour (playing comparatively modest 2,000- to 4,000-capacity venues) off the back of that first record. Despite a packed schedule, the band were somehow managing to squeeze in some studio time Down Under, attempting to finish off the



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THE SONGS ▶▶

1 SCOUNDREL DAYS

"Was that somebody screaming?" It's a bold opening line over an eerie arpeggiated synth line – a combination that reeks of early Human League, particularly in the Philip Oakey vocal stylings, with a little Depeche Mode thrown in. The lyrics are almost uncomfortably direct: "I can feel the sweat on my lips leaking into my mouth", and vaguely opera-like in their stream-of-conscious delivery. The title track is dark and gothic, cinematic and dramatic. We can only assume that abstract opening minute is intended to filter out the casual fans before it hits that soaring chorus we've come to know. Here on in, it's got the powerhouse drama of Duran Duran, though much more menacing than casual fans would expect, with the darkness of The Cure or Echo And The Bunnymen. Live strings in the final third give a cinematic feel that hints perhaps of their later Bond theme.

2 THE SWING OF THINGS

It opens with jingly bell synths that recall Depeche once again, a cool bass sound and electro tom-tom drum fills, followed by a jittery beat, before dropping into half time for the chorus (oh so very a-ha!). Their influence on Coldplay is very apparent in the epic singalong chorus. The synth sounds are fantastic, and so completely of their time, with the baritone vocals. Very lyrical, and again, it's a very epic, melodramatic sound. Over the course of four-plus minutes, *The Swing Of Things* morphs through at least seven different genres – constantly switching the rhythm or mood as soon as you feel you have a handle on it. Eventually, it rises into a driving rock song, thanks to propulsive drums that wouldn't be out of place on a Springsteen drivetime anthem like *Born To Run.*

3 I'VE BEEN LOSING YOU

The first single of the record. A lighter mid-tempo, yet upbeat, track, with more frenetic drums from Michael Sturgis (listen out for that totally ridiculous drum fill after a break just under four minutes in) and a groovy bassline. On first listen, it's not an immediately obvious choice for a single, but then that's just indicative of the darker sound that characterises the album. On repeated listens, it reveals itself to be an anthem of epic proportions. Again, it's got all the strut and swagger of Duran Duran dancing on the sand. The live drums add muscle and grit to the sound. The song's genesis apparently began from a track from Waaktaar and Furuholmen's earlier pre-a-ha group, Bridges.

4 OCTOBER

A total change of pace here, opening with an atmospheric intro with a slightly incongruous blend of found sounds: ocean waves lapping against the shore, mangled church bells, footsteps and other otherworldly sonics. From here, it then breaks into elevator muzak, lounge bossa nova with an 808 drum pattern, before the whispered vocals inject a more menacing quality, at odds with the backing track, music hall brass, and whimsical whistling. Combined with the vaguely mockney vocal styling it comes off as a precursor to Damon Albarn's fairground ride interludes that punctuate Blur's 'Life' trilogy a decade later. Wait a minute, did a-ha just invent Britpop?

5 MANHATTAN SKYLINE

A chiming, glistening synth harpsichord sound waltzes along beautifully, as a subtle and subdued Morten Harket sings "wave goodbye" in a sweet falsetto, before a minute in, dirty grungy guitars and eerie synths come in and shake up all preconceptions as the vocal turns into a guttural primal growl. This is a-ha at their absolute best, experimental and genuinely thrilling.

6 CRY WOLF

Opening with the suggestion of screaming crowds, over a spooky spoken word, before a very funky synth bassline (with shades of Michael Jackson's *Thriller*) and another frenetic drum part. One of the catchiest tracks, particularly with the falsetto "woo-ooh" refrain on the chorus after the "cry wolf". This could almost pass for Talking Heads on *Speaking In Tongues* in its pure, angular white-boy funkiness and percussive stabs. One of a few tracks on the album to build around a groove rather than a chord progression.

7 WE'RE LOOKING FOR THE WHALES

A chugging synth sound over atmospheric sounds, a slow beat then skips to double time (the recurring a-ha trademark). With its upbeat major key progression, it's one of most straight-up pop sounding tracks… but also not, with its abstract lyrical content.

8 THE WEIGHT OF THE WIND

Another characteristically 80s intro with snappy keyboards and busy programmed drums, leading into a dramatic soaring, almost operatic vocal from Morten replete with heavy lyrical imagery. There's a particularly whizzy synth solo two minutes in. This brand of pompous bluster would later be replicated by The Killers to great effect.

9 MAYBE, MAYBE

Suddenly, the mood is switched entirely, with a very light and bouncy Paul McCartney sound. The lyrics here sound dangerously close to the classic Morrissey line (co-incidentally or not) released in the same year: "Maybe, you were only joking when you said that you were walking out on me." OK, well perhaps that's not quite as bad as being bludgeoned in your bed, Morten. Vocally, it's tinged with a little Roy Orbison vibrato, further enhancing the Mozza effect. It was released as a single – though apparently only in Bolivia, and exactly what enamoured it to that territory would be interesting to know. It's a fun, good-time catchy melody. With its plodding, almost ska-lite rhythm, it's comparatively throwaway compared to the more dramatic moments elsewhere, but a needed change and one of the most accessible songs on the record. A frantically busy synth interlude takes it somewhere different.

10 SOFT RAINS OF APRIL

A dramatic opening, with synth pads and arpeggiating synths, later joined by synthesized harp sounds and eerie keyboards. This album, and indeed this song particularly, highlights how real-deal musos a-ha actually were. It's really quite proggy. Following the earlier vocals, which are caked in reverb, the very last word of the song (and album), appropriately 'over', is dry, close and up-front, ending the record with a sudden, strange feeling of claustrophobic intimacy. This track was another cut lifted from Mags' and Paul's Bridges days.

THE VIDEOS ▶▶

I'VE BEEN LOSING YOU
The band continued their fruitful collaboration with British director, Steve Barron, which had brought them such great success on their first album. (Barron's promo credits are essentially MTV's greatest hits: *Billie Jean, Africa, Money For Nothing, Mad World, Don't You Want Me*…). No revolutionary effects here, though. In this case, it's a fairly bog standard performance video, filmed live at a show, although it ably serves the purpose of highlighting a-ha's 'authentic' rock star credentials, live energy and adulation. In other words, lots of soft focus of Morten's sweating torso, slow-motion posturing and freeze frames of a rapturous crowd, comprised (of course) of adoring young female fans.

CRY WOLF
Again directed by now regular collaborator, Steve Barron, in France. Riffing on the 'Big Bad Wolf' motif, it intercuts footage from a live concert to screaming fans in a large hall with on-location scenes shot in and around the Château de Couches in Burgundy – a suitable backdrop for the pastoral folk-tale theme of the lyrics. In another groundbreaking effect, a young kid is leafing through the pages of a pop-up fairytale book. Throughout, there's the tension of a lurking, looming threat. Then the angry mob come out to the chateau at night with lit torches, before disappearing again as the band play and it returns to the stage setting from which the video began.

MANHATTAN SKYLINE
Another to be directed by Steve Barron. Taking cues from the iconic hand-drawn rotoscoping *Take On Me* video, this one riffs on the newspaper theme from the opening lyric: "We sit and watch umbrellas fly/ I'm trying to keep my newspaper dry". The animation builds up from black and white, dot-to-dot drawings into outlines of the various band members performing, then moves on to crosswords and newspaper headlines. As the heavy guitar part comes in, the band are now photos within the newspaper that come to life, pre-empting the animated photos in the *Daily Prophet* from the Harry Potter movies. The newspaper at the end is one of Norway's well-known publications. Paul is playing the drums in the video – and displaying some genuinely impressive chops at the kit – although in reality on record the part was actually played by his Bridges ex-cohort, Øystein Jevanord.

THAT FIRST RECORD FORGED THEIR POP POSTER BOYS IMAGE, WHICH STILL DEFINES THEM TO THIS DAY. IN REALITY, *SCOUNDREL DAYS* SETS OUT TO PROVE IT WAS AN ILL-FITTING TAG THAT NEVER REALLY SUITED THEM IN THE FIRST PLACE.

next record. During that interview, Morten was asked the inevitable awkward question of how he felt about being 'packaged' – the singer responded in good spirits, gently emphasising it was the music that ultimately mattered to them, the connection with the audience, and the chemistry of the band.

That first record forged their pop poster boys image that (for the casual observer, at least) still defines them to this day. In reality, as second album *Scoundrel Days* sets out to prove, it was an ill-fitting tag that never really suited in the first place. They didn't try to escape the shadow of *Take On Me* by writing even bigger pop songs. Instead, the trio ventured into darker terrain. A first listen of *Scoundrel Days* suggests it was designed to be a correction – a realignment that wiped clean all you thought you knew about a-ha and reintroduced them as sophisti-pop connoisseurs.

Often throughout, Morten's vocal stylings are reminiscent of Simon Le Bon's rich powerhouse delivery, but unlike Duran Duran's projection of decadence, glamour and yachts in the Caribbean, a-ha's imagery on *Scoundrel Days* fixates on subjects ranging from isolation and personal terror to abstract notions of searching for whales. Even the album's title projects the contrary image of rough edges and seediness.

With its grandiose epic melodrama and verbose gothic lyricism, this brand of a-ha is more Smashing Pumpkins than *Smash Hits*. It's tempting to draw some comparisons with their contemporaries, Talk Talk, who initially were marketed as the 'next Duran Duran' by their record company, before breaking the mould to evolve into something more complex, pastoral and experimental.

A-ha are the textbook example that it takes 10 years to become an overnight success. The pre-fame rock band, Bridges (formed in the late 70s by teenage chums, Paul and Magne) was pivotal in the development of their sound. Growing up on prog rock and psychedelic bands, their songcraft is as much indebted to Genesis and King Crimson as the synth-pop trappings they adopted of their own era. Once you understand that, it's easy to identify in the proggy tempo changes, unexpected turns and abstract flourishes that abound on *Scoundrel Days*. See, for example, a-ha's classic trademark fast/slow pivot, as exhibited previously on *Take On Me*, which rears its head on several occasions.

All of the songs on *Scoundrel Days* were written by Waaktaar and Furuholmen, with several composed solely by the former. Indeed, some of them began as either ideas or fully-fledged songs originally performed by Bridges – a catalogue of riches to be mined. (The original version of *Soft Rains Of April* finally saw the light of day in 2018, when Bridges' second album, *Våkenatt*, was released, almost four decades after its recording.)

Despite his contributions to a couple of tracks on the first record, Morten Harket stepped back from the writing process. His limited involvement in this element has remained fairly consistent throughout the band's career. Yet, while he rarely pens the lyrics or melodies he performs, he owns them entirely, delivering his bandmates' words with absolute conviction, eking out the emotion of each syllable. Though there are clear and frequent stylistic reference points to his contemporaries, Harket's range is without equal and his personality key to a-ha's unique character.

THE DIFFICULT SECOND ALBUM

The album was largely produced by Alan Tarney, who'd been brought in on *Hunting High And Low* to deliver the hit singles. God knows what the record label must have thought, then, when they turned in *Scoundrel Days*, because there's little here that is as immediate or accessible.

Morten onstage at the first of three Royal Albert Hall shows in 1986

© Getty

***Scoundrel Days* went to No.2 in the UK and went on to sell more than six million copies worldwide**

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NOTHING IS ACCIDENTAL, IT'S ALL DELIBERATELY CRAFTED. THE LYRICAL CHOICES, MELODIC OR RHYTHMIC TURNS, AND OCCASIONALLY ABRASIVE MOMENTS ARE WILFULLY ABSTRUSE.

Even on the singles, *Scoundrel Days* demands more of the listener. The answers aren't laid out in a conveniently digestible format, instead requiring repeated listens to unpick. Throughout, arrangements are busy, often densely layered in a slightly muddy mix. Sure, there's an expensive sounding gloss applied, but it's tempered by the many idiosyncratic twists they take. Nothing is accidental, it's all very deliberately crafted. The lyrical choices, melodic or rhythmic turns, and occasionally abrasive moments are wilfully abstruse.

There's plenty of melodrama in the Tears For Fears mould, but actually it's much weirder, more experimental and gothic than the Bath duo in many ways. In 2009, Magne told Dermot O'Leary during an interview with BBC Radio 2: "I feel more connected to Depeche Mode" when compared to their other contemporaries. That analogy certainly feels apt for much of *Scoundrel Days*, particularly when Morten delivers bleak couplets in a rich baritone over icy synths.

But it's not all weighty, impending doom. A-ha's "epic melancholia" (as Mags describes it) has always traversed that thin line between pain and euphoria – or "dancing with tears in my eyes" as another contemporary might have put it. There are lighter moments, even those approaching whimsy, like *Maybe, Maybe*, which could just about pass for Syd Barrett if you strained your ear. And *Cry Wolf*, its menacing folktale inspiration aside, is as downright funky as anything Prince contributed to the dancefloor in the mid-80s. At various points, the album is danceable, uplifting and a hell of a lot of fun.

Waaktaar's guitar hero ambitions are brought to the fore more explicitly, with thrilling results. While it's still fundamentally a synth-pop record at heart (complete with all its stylistic trappings), a-ha are expanding the palette with occasionally abrasive guitars (see *Manhattan Skyline*) and quite frankly ridiculous drumming from session extraordinaire, Mike Sturgis. During those overblown fills on *I've Been Losing You*, you half expect the drummer to spontaneously combust in a *Spinal Tap*-esque puff of smoke. Clearly, they're having fun with it, delivering the pomp with a raised eyebrow.

Scoundrel Days is a tricky one to place at times. Critics might argue the songs are slightly stilted by the robust and brittle mid-80s production treatment. On record, it's near impossible to separate the core of each track from its muscular stylistic trappings. However, watching the same songs performed live at a 1994 arena show in South Africa, it's a totally different beat – loose, raw, rocky, and well-worn in like your favourite pair of old jeans. By now you're witnessing a well-oiled live unit that's confident enough in its tightness to play it loose. Both versions have their merits, but the fact that the songs have evolved into enduring and anthemic fan favourites is testament to their power. Since that first meteoric rise, a-ha have remained underdogs of sorts. Rock royalty in their native Norway and quietly selling out colossal venues around the world, if never quite matching those heights in the UK and US mainstream. But time has served them well, with ongoing props from transatlantic rock A-listers like Coldplay and Weezer further cementing their status within that league. Despite the attempts of *Scoundrel Days*, they will never shake the clutches of *Take On Me*. Some 35 years after conquering MTV, *Take On Me* conquered its successor platform, YouTube. In 2020, it became one of a select few to reach the one billion views mark (since then, that figure has nearly doubled).

Scoundrel Days is a-ha's 'difficult second album'. But don't confuse that for a lack of ambition or running out of steam. On the contrary, it was intentionally engineered that way; a deliberate altering of course that didn't thwart their legacy, but merely rebuilt in their own design. It was no commercial flop, even by their own standards, going on to shift over six million units and counting. In truth, it's not a drastic departure from the sound that made them bedroom pin-ups, but it asserted artistic ambitions far beyond the two-dimensional image that had been bestowed upon them. *Scoundrel Days* is a harder nut to crack, but it's more than worth persevering for the rich rewards it contains inside. ■

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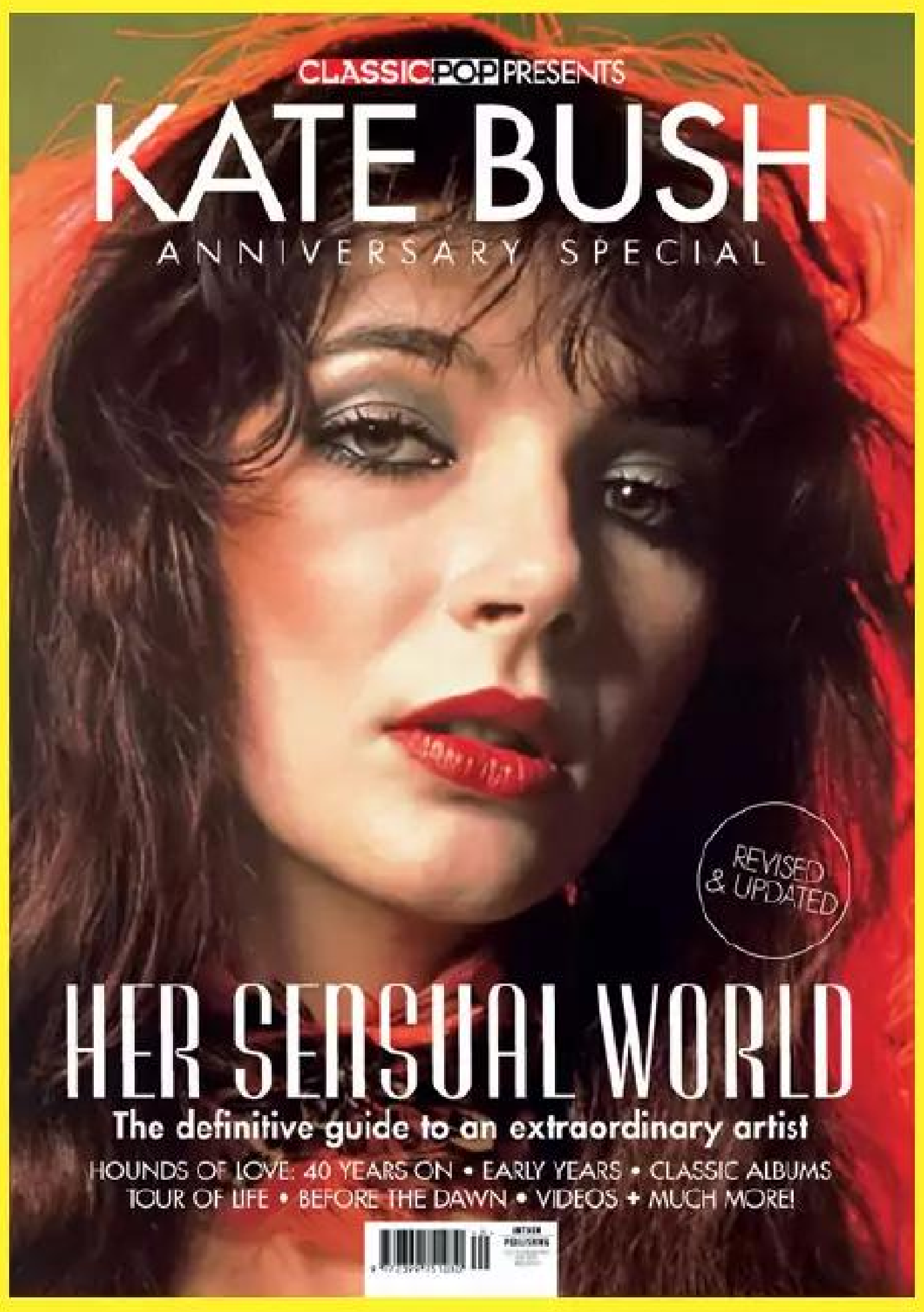
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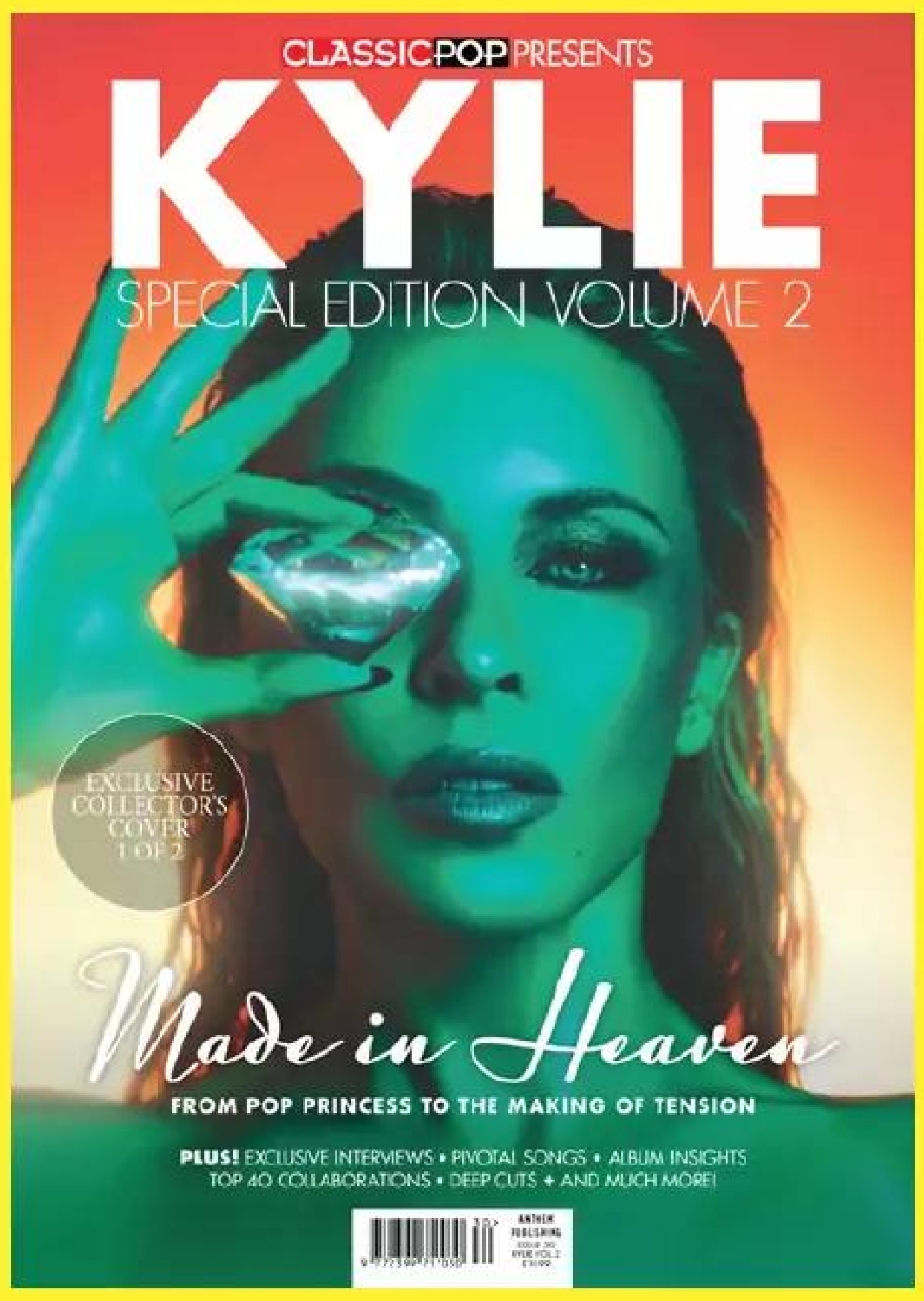
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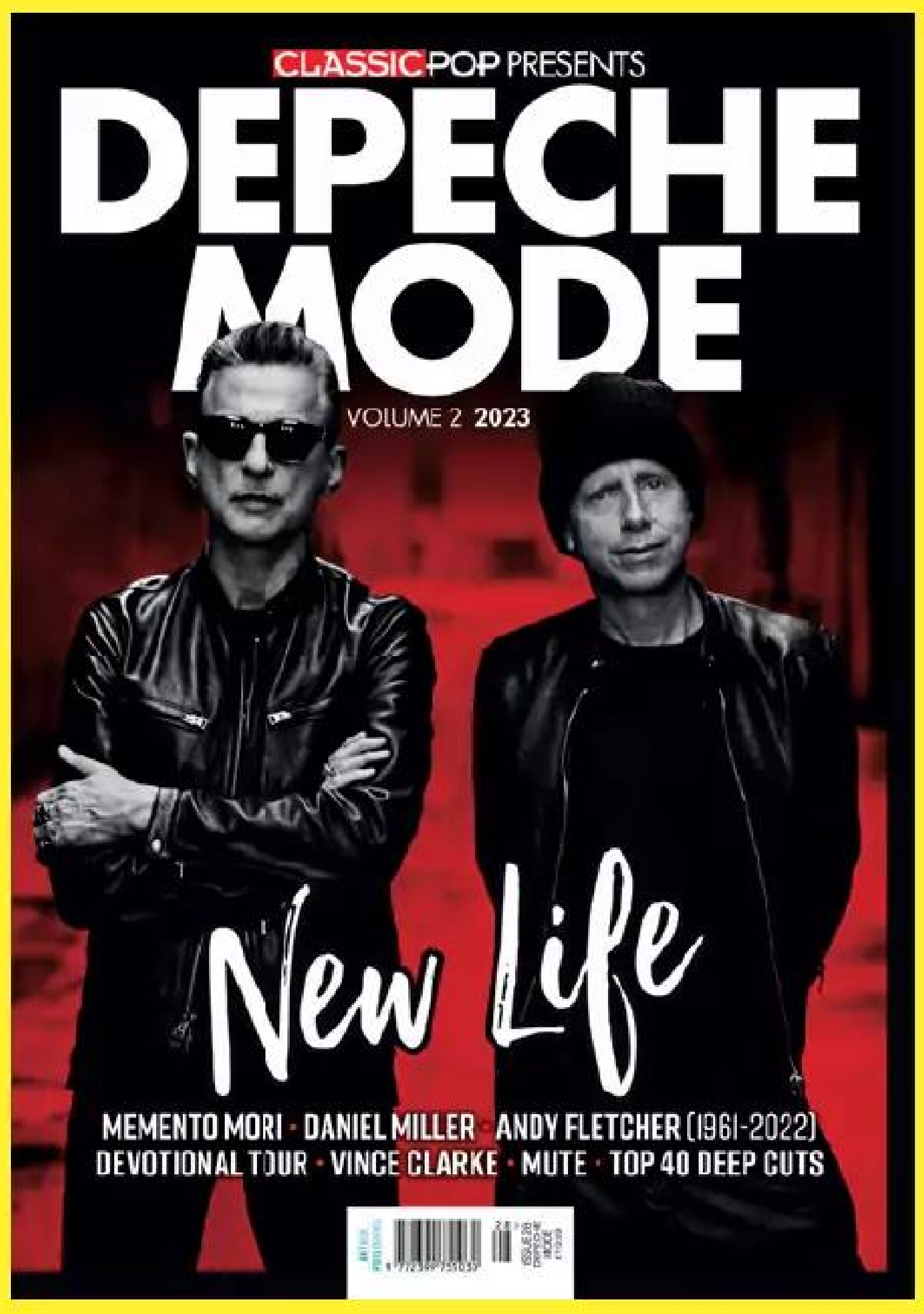
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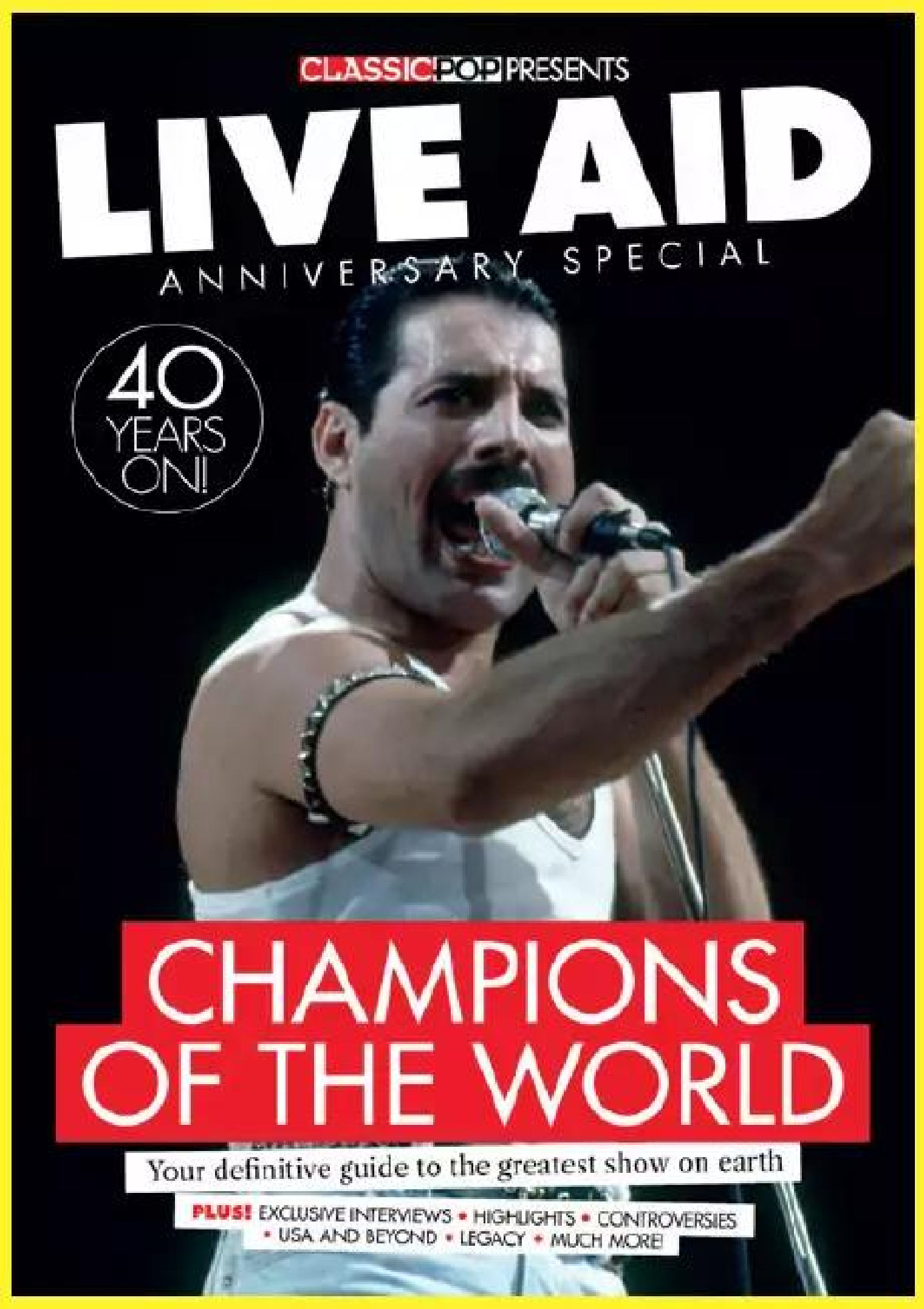
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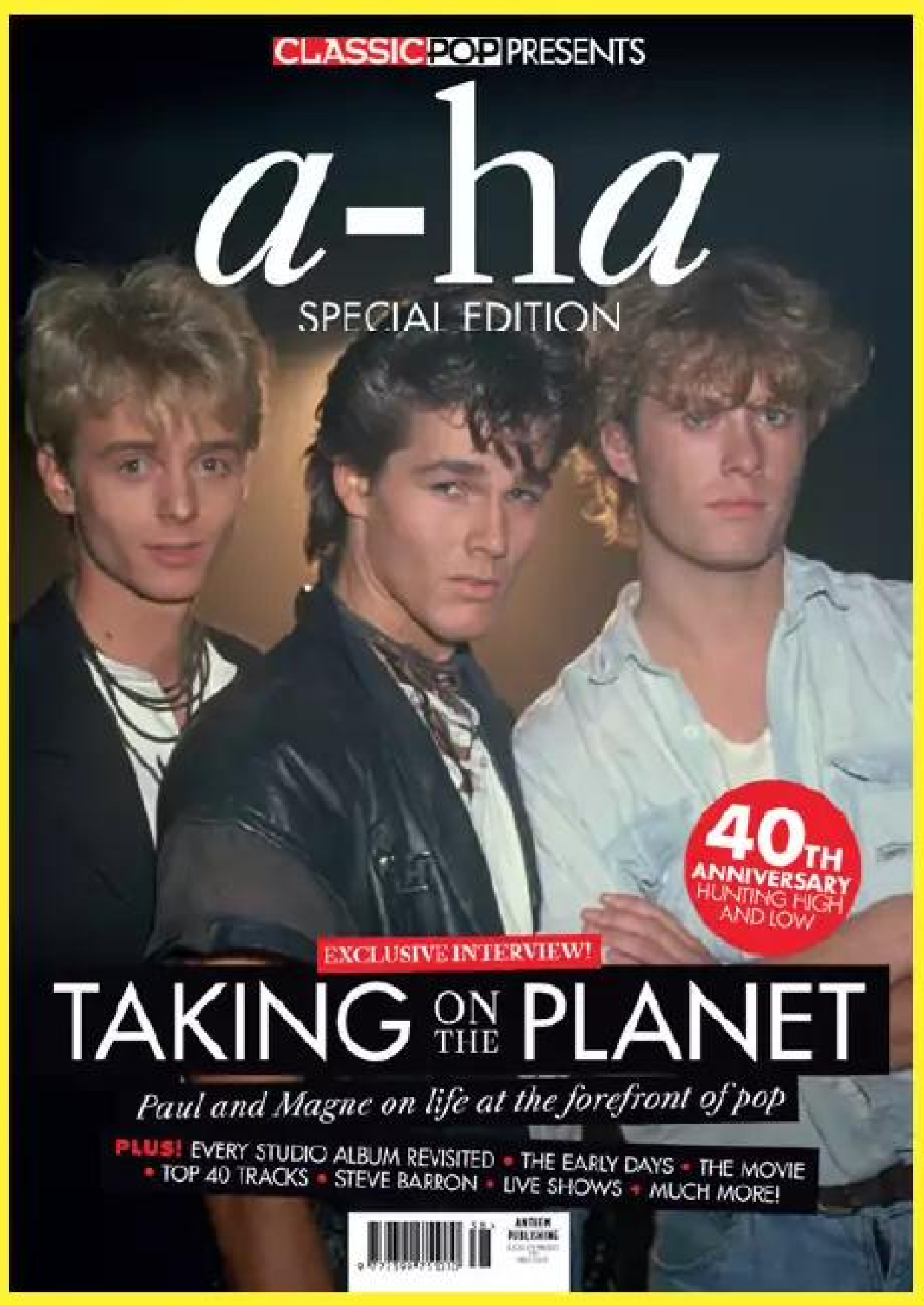
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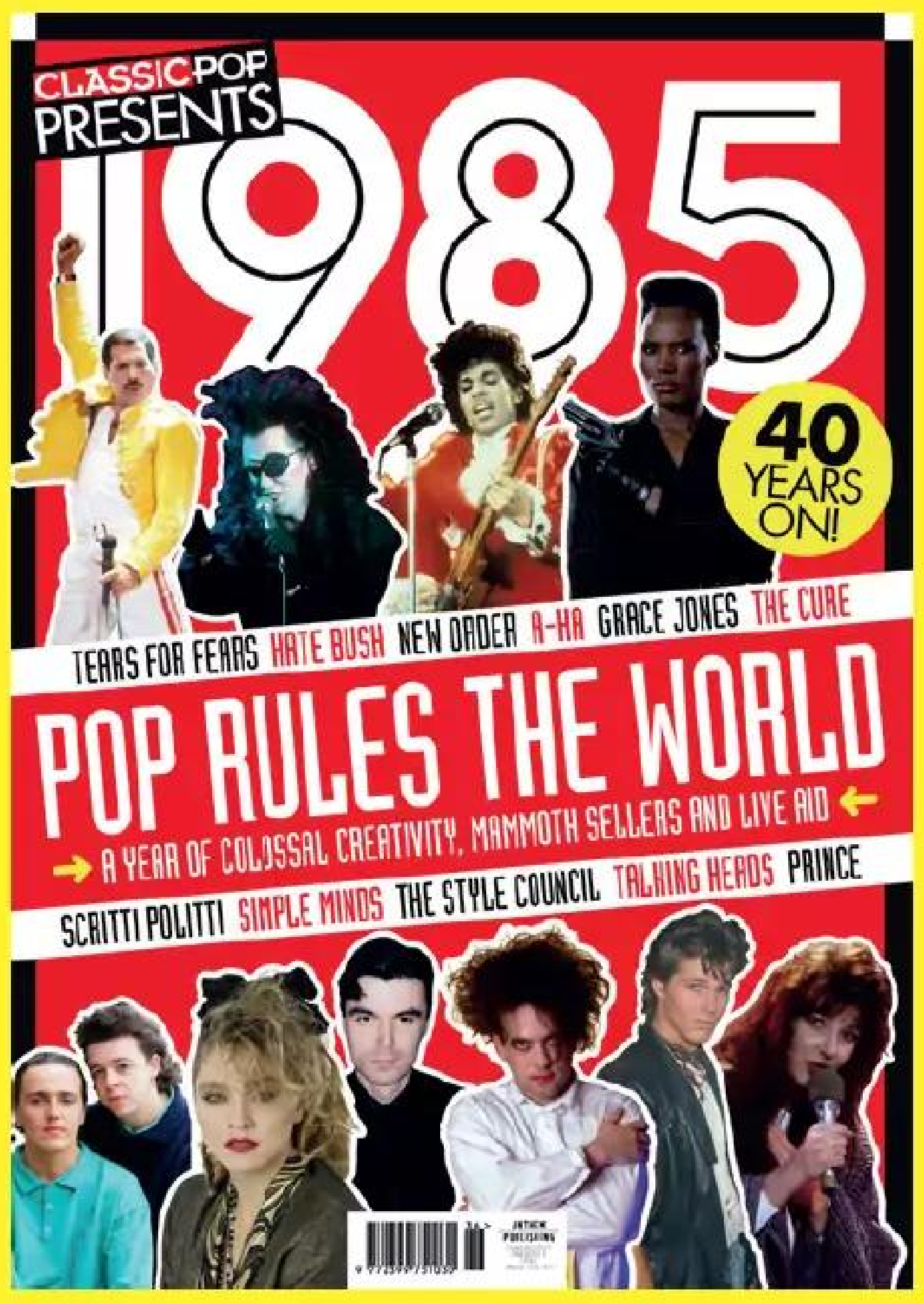
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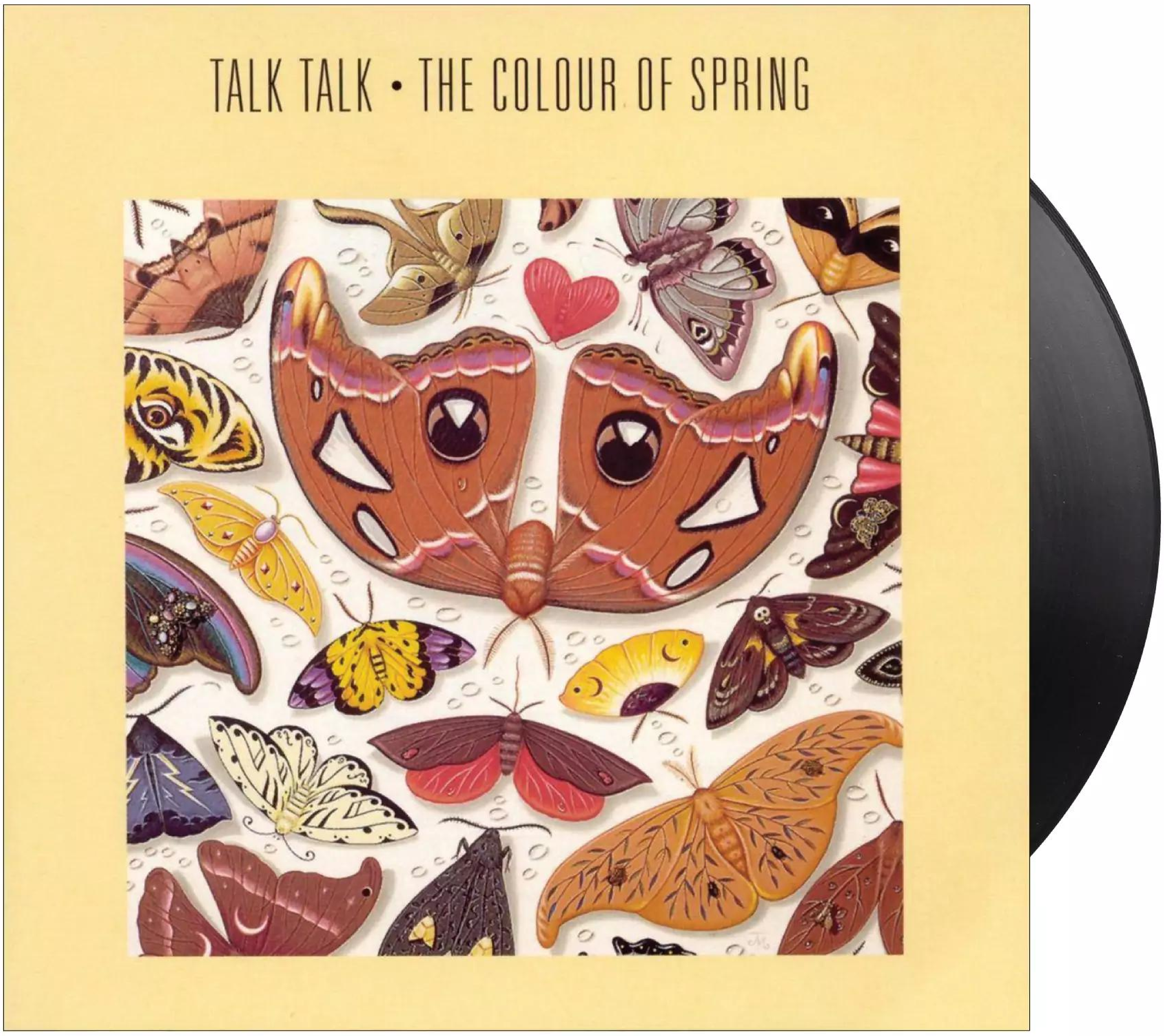

TALK TALK • THE COLOUR OF SPRING

CLASSIC ALBUM

THE COLOUR OF SPRING
TALK TALK

AFTER STARTING LIFE AS ONE OF MANY BANDS CYNICALLY MARKETED BY RECORD COMPANIES TO CASH IN ON THE NEW ROMANTIC SCENE, ON THIRD STUDIO ALBUM *THE COLOUR OF SPRING* TALK TALK PROPELLED THEMSELVES FROM SYNTH-POP NEWCOMERS TOWARDS BOLDLY EXPERIMENTAL TERRITORY…

NEIL CROSSLEY

The outpouring of tributes following the sudden death of Mark Hollis in 2019 was notable for the sheer depth of respect shown to the Talk Talk founder and frontman by his contemporaries. One of the most repeated and retweeted quotes in the hours and days following the 64-year-old's death came from a 2012 interview with Guy Garvey in *Mojo*, in which the Elbow frontman discussed Hollis' enduring influence. "Mark started from punk and by his own admission he had no musical ability," said Garvey. "To go from having the urge, to writing some of the most timeless, intricate and original music ever is as impressive as the moon landings."

It's a sentiment reinforced by many. Over the course of five albums, Hollis would transform Talk Talk from an intriguing post-punk outfit to a band that created an extraordinary body of work, breathtakingly beautiful music with a spiritual power that could move listeners to their core.

The first real signs of what Talk Talk were capable of came with their third studio album, *The Colour Of Spring*, on which they wrenched themselves free from the constraints of 1980s commercialism and pursued a stunningly creative course.

More than three decades on from its release, this ethereal and enigmatic album still resonates as strongly as the day that it was released.

From the outset, Mark Hollis' musical touchstones were eclectic. Born in

© Getty

THE SONGS ▶▶

① HAPPINESS IS EASY

A cool, spacious drum groove and skittering percussion intro this majestic, haunting opening track, before Danny Thompson's distinctive double bass and warm lush piano chords glide into the mix. "Makes you feel much older/ Sublime the blind parade/ It wrecks me how they justify their acts," implores Hollis, his strained, achingly poignant voice injecting a real pathos into the song. As always, it's the placement of space between the instruments that really elevates Talk Talk's sound to a higher plane: a reverb-soaked conga one second, a high-end piano trill the next, always enhancing, never conflicting. All the album's big-gun session players are on here: Steve Winwood on Hammond, Robbie McIntosh on guitar, Thompson on bass. A hugely emotive and inspirational opener.

② I DON'T BELIEVE IN YOU

A troubled relationship appears to be the lyrical focus of this track, which features Hollis at his most poignant and plaintive. "Now the fun is over," he begins. "Where do words begin/ I'm trying to find the path ahead/ Any way you say it/ The charade goes on." A slow, languorous groove harnesses a simple chord progression in the verse: Amin/G/Amin before building up through A/F/Emin/G towards the chorus. Bassist Paul Webb was an integral feature of Talk Talk's sound, creating strong melodic lines that would both anchor and inspire. Here, he provides a bass part of flawless taste and economy, while at 2:55 guitarist Robbie McIntosh unleashes some searing sustained notes that take the song to fresh heights.

③ LIFE'S WHAT YOU MAKE IT

"We always wanted to make a song that was based on a very simple piano riff and a subsequent tight drum part," said Mark Hollis, speaking in 1986 about *Life's What You MakeIt*, released as a single in 1985 to fuel interest in the album. The song was the last to be written, following concern from their management over the lack of an obvious single. While initially resistant, Hollis and Friese-Greene approached it as a challenge. "I had a drum pattern loosely inspired by Kate Bush's *Running Up That Hill*," Friese-Greene noted, "and Mark was playing *Green Onions* organ over the top." Bold, pounding and dynamic, and enhanced by David Rhodes' strident guitar hook, *Life's What You Make It* is the soaring high point of the album. Animal sounds intro and outro the track. "They put nature into sound," observed caughtbytheriver.net's Robin Blunt, "emulating the ebb and flow of the natural world in their records."

④ APRIL 5TH

A gentle smattering of tambourine, shaker and other percussive elements introduces this fragile minimalistic ballad, whose lyrics contain the album's title phrase. A haunting piano motif roots the track, with natural stops and starts, over which Mark Hollis's remarkable voice recounts the onset of a new season, personified as a woman. "Come gentle spring/ Come at winter's end/ Gone is the pallor from a promise that's nature's gift," he intones. Not for the first time, the sound evokes elements of Van Morrison, as Graeme Thomson noted in *The Guardian* in 2017. "The gently decaying two-chord outro, a glorious tapestry of glistening piano, tenderly probing saxophone, acoustic guitar and stately organ, finds Hollis tripping over himself in a metaphysical trance," he wrote.

⑤ LIVING IN ANOTHER WORLD

It's wholly fitting that Steve Winwood is at the helm of the Hammond organ on this track, as there's more than a hint of the warm, organic and pastoral strains of Traffic on this strident seven-minute sonic tour de force. The track gallops along from the outset, with Paul Webb's bass only entering the mix at 0:52 on the Bmin to G shift, instantly elevating the track with its strong melodic line and flawless feel. In an interview with Italian TV in 1987, Hollis explained that the French existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre inspired the lyrics of this track. One musician for whom it holds relentless allure is Scottish singer-songwriter Kenny Anderson, aka King Creosote. "I never tire of [the song]," he said in the 2012 book *Spirit Of Talk Talk*: "and yet I don't quite understand how they managed to make it sound like a musical version of that famous MC Escher staircase."

⑥ GIVE IT UP

Hollis was inspired by the modal jazz of Miles Davis, and it's an influence that can be heard on this track. Producer Tim Friese-Greene provides the prevailing Hammond organ part and, once again, Paul Webb's bassline brings a hook-laden melody that underpins the top line while driving the song forward. David Rhodes contributes growling, gutteral guitar sweeps at 3:22 while Hollis delivers the lyrics with utter conviction. "From the place that I stand/ To the land that is openly free/ Watching rivers run black/ By the trees that are vacant to greed."

⑦ CHAMELEON DAY

Béla Bartok is the principle influence behind the short, sparse instrumental piece that introduces *Chameleon Day*. Bartok was one of the impressionistic classical composers that Hollis was listening to during the making of *The Colour Of Spring*. "Breathe on me, eclipse my mind/ It's in some kind of disarray," sings Hollis in a voice of immense intimacy and purity. The track features the Variophon, an electronic wind instrument invented in 1975 by researchers at the University of Cologne.

⑧ TIME IT'S TIME

By the release of *The Colour Of Spring*, all traces of Talk Talk's synth-pop past were gone, replaced by strong influences of Traffic, Debussy and Satie. The warmth of the Hammond organ, acoustic piano, acoustic guitar and a whole range of quirky instruments such as Mellotron and melodica predominate. The pastoral themes of *The Colour Of Spring* are all pervasive on the album's final track. Hollis' lyrics, as ever, are both deeply poignant and enigmatic. "Nobody knows how long/ Rustling leaves unrhyme/ Lullaby breeze unsung/ Babel of dreams." As is often the case with Talk Talk, the modal shifts reach ever upwards.

Tottenham, north London in 1955, he was heavily influenced by his elder brother Ed, a voracious collector of records who would go on to manage and produce Canvey Island pub rockers Eddie And The Hot Rods. Ed Hollis guided his younger brother towards sounds that he otherwise may not have encountered, from free jazz and prog rock to American garage bands. One record that had a pivotal impact on him was the 1972 US garage compilation album *Nuggets*, which prompted him to form his first band, The Reaction, in 1977.

Like many, he'd also been galvanised by the can-do DIY ethos of punk. "Up until punk, there's no way I could have imagined I could get a record deal because I didn't think I could play," he told Jim Irvin in *Rock's Back Pages* in 1998, "but punk said, 'If you think you can play, you can play.'"

Mark and brother Ed co-wrote a single, *Talk Talk Talk Talk*, which appeared on the *Streets* compilation, credited to The Reaction. In June 1978, the band released the single *I Can't Resist*, but in 1979 they split up.

Spurred on by his brother, Mark wrote a new batch of songs and began forging a much broader sound. He put together a new band with keyboard player Simon Brenner, and two former members of Southendbased reggae outfit Eskalator, drummer Lee Harris and bassist Paul Webb. Things moved quickly for the new unit. A demo found its way to Keith Aspden, A&R at EMI, who was so impressed that he left his job to manage them. EMI signed the band, now called Talk Talk, and set about trying to mould them into the next Duran Duran, one of the label's major acts.

The initial plan for the band had been a piano, bass and drums trio, with Hollis on lead vocals. But the synth-heavy sound of the times inevitably crept in. EMI teamed them up with producer Colin Thurston, whose credits included David Bowie, The Human League and Duran Duran. The result was Talk Talk's 1982 debut album *The Party's Over*, which yielded two singles, *Mirror Man* and a re-recorded version of *Talk Talk*. The record was a moderate success, reaching No.21 in the UK Albums Chart.

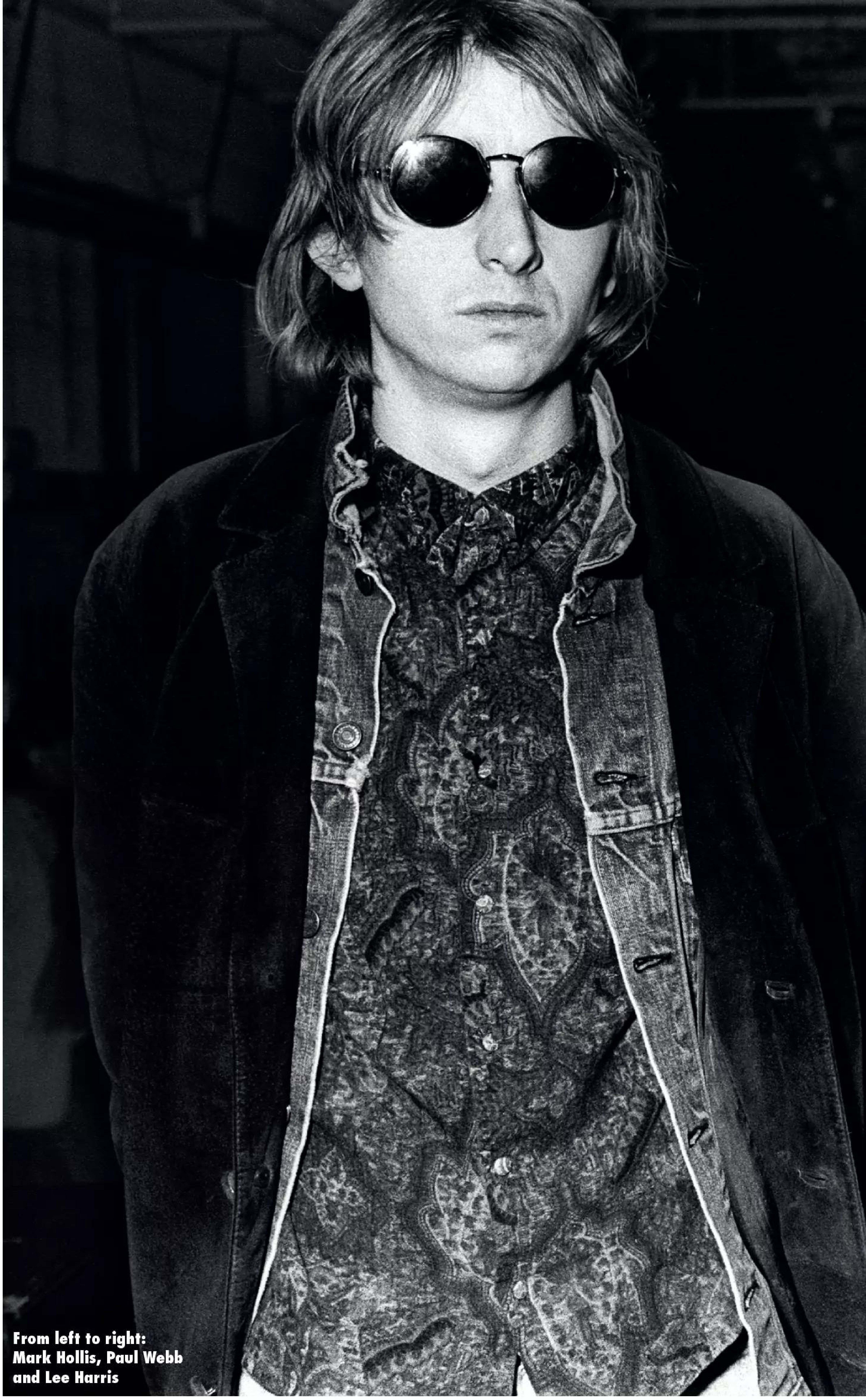
Despite the encouraging start, the band became increasingly appalled by EMI's efforts to market them as part of the New Romantic movement. When Brenner left in 1983, they made no effort to replace him on keyboards, keen to distance themselves from the whole synth-pop genre. The band had tired, too, of plush publicity shots that had them kitted out in garish white silken box jackets.

"It gets tiring to listen to the Duran comparisons," Hollis told *Noise!* magazine at the time. "I can't hear it myself. I get depressed about the whole thing [because] kids ought to know about music, not image."

In a concerted effort to shed their pop image and stretch themselves creatively, the band took a year out to record the album that would become *It's My Life* (1984). At the same time, they rejected once and for all the image that EMI had foisted on them, abandoning the garish suits for donkey jackets, woolly hats and jeans. They recruited producer and musician Tim Friese-Greene, which was to prove to be a key move in their development. Friese-Greene became the band's de facto fourth member, their producer, keyboard player and – critically – Hollis' principal songwriting partner.

His impact was immediate. *It's My Life* was the sound of a band transforming from the time-locked limitations of synth-pop into more mature and sophisticated music. Lyrically, the focus was far more personal and emotive. And while synthesizers still dominated, the band were confident enough to introduce world-music rhythms and real, non-digital instruments into their sound, as well as animal noises recorded at London Zoo. The songwriting was far more assured than their debut. This was a cohesive album, with a collection of songs encapsulated within warm, gently seductive grooves.

It's My Life produced three singles: *Such A Shame*, *Dum Dum Girl* and the title track, the latter going on to become the band's biggest hit, as well as spawning a hit almost two decades later, for US band No Doubt. The album also contained what was arguably the band's finest recording to date, on the track *Renée*, a showcase for Hollis' deeply soulful and melancholic vocals, a style defined by *The Guardian* as "full of pathos, restrained passion and a sense of struggle".



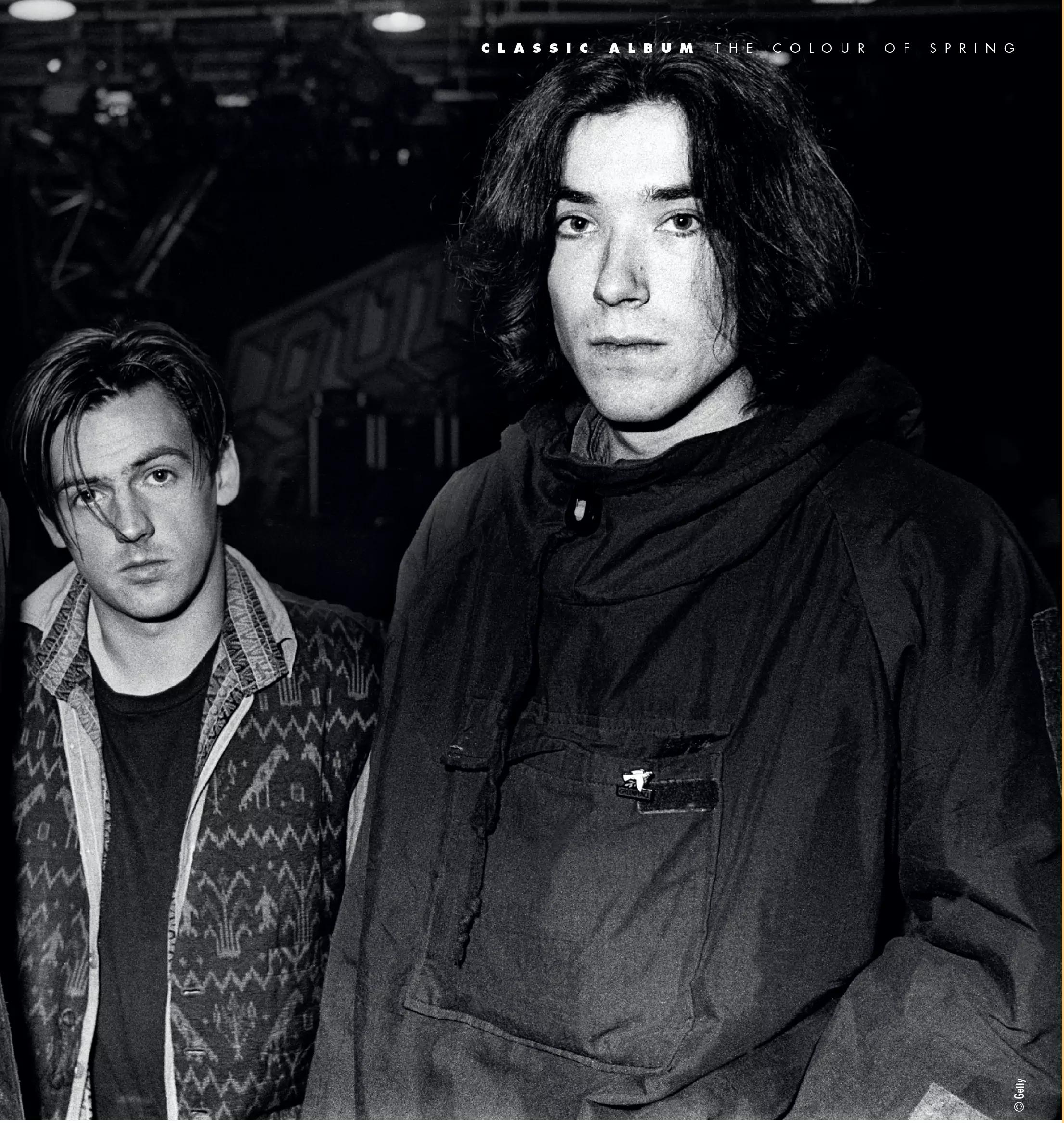
From left to right: Mark Hollis, Paul Webb and Lee Harris

The *It's My Life* album reached Top 5 in numerous European countries, but only reached No.35 in the UK charts. This was possibly due to the band's decision to distance themselves from the mainstream market, a move amply demonstrated by their choice of video for the *It's My Life single*. Directed by Tim Pope and largely compiled from rushes from the David Attenborough-helmed BBC series *Life On Earth*, the video was rejected by EMI. The re-shot promo featured a dour-looking Mark Hollis declining to lip-sync to the backing track.

The recording sessions for the *It's My Life* album also marked the beginning of an obsessively intense process of overdubbing, as Mike Oldfield's bass player Phil Spalding found when he turned up for a session. Talk Talk bassist Paul Webb was an exclusively fretless bass player, so Spalding was drafted in to play fretted bass on the track *The Last Time*. Spalding arrived at the sessions "disastrously hungover" and spent an entire afternoon and evening doing relentless retakes of the same bass part.

"We always had to go all around the houses to get next door," said Ian Curnow, session keyboard player on the album, "just in case there was anything that turned up on the other side."

Buoyed by the creative success of *It's My Life*, Hollis took a brave and radical decision: to banish synthesizers altogether from their next album and utilise only the natural sound



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"BARTOK'S STRING QUARTETS… I'D NEVER IMAGINED SOMETHING SO BEAUTIFUL EXISTED"

MARK HOLLIS

and acoustic possibilities of traditional instruments such as piano, organ and guitar. The band took a year out to record the next album and a welter of session players were drafted in, such as Steve Winwood, guitarist Robbie McIntosh, bassist Danny Thompson and harmonica player Mark Feltham. The result would be a far more organic sound, with a sonic direction that would come to dominate their music from that point on.

Hollis and Friese-Greene spent the first four months of 1985 writing the songs, with the band then joining them in the studio to start laying down parts.

"At first, we were spending 12 hours a day, six days a week in the studio," Hollis told the *Glasgow Evening Times* in February 1986, "then towards the end we gave ourselves the weekends off. Trying to stay fresh is the most difficult thing on such a long project."

During recording, Hollis was listening to music by impressionist classical composers such as Satie, Debussy and Milhaud. Bartok in particular had a profound influence on the album. "Bartok's string quartets… I'd never imagined something so beautiful existed," he said. "Bartok has an impact on the arrangements on *The Colour Of Spring*."

Instrumentally, acoustic piano and Hammond organ would prove the mainstay of the keyboard work on the album, with the highest-profile guest musician on the album, Steve Winwood, contributing some stunningly atmospheric parts on the Hammond. Some more obscure instruments would also feature, such as the Variophon, an electronic instrument invented in 1975 by researchers at the

THE VIDEOS

LIFE'S WHAT YOU MAKE IT
Intercut with shots of nature, this night-time performance finds the band playing in the great outdoors amid a beautiful woodland. Hollis maintains his enigmatic persona as he plays piano, its keys dappled with dew and his breath misting up as he sings in the cold night air. Various animals including a fox, badger, centipede, hedgehog and mouse meander through the undergrowth as the band plays on. Lee Harris thuds away impressively on the drums. In a wonderful climax, dawn breaks as the band finish playing and two rabbits skip off into the distance.

LIVING IN ANOTHER WORLD
Hollis resumes his position at the piano for the dramatic shots where he crashes out the opening chords of this second single from the album. Then all hell breaks loose. The lights come on and a wind machine blasts a hurricane into Hollis' face. With the band's frontman literally in the eye of the storm, the camera pans out to a studio to find Harris and Webb accompanying him. Such is the ferocity of the wind machine, Hollis can't help but break into a smile at several points. At the song's midpoint, he climbs on top of the piano to jump onto the exposed strings, creating another crashing, atonal chord. As the piano then lifts off and takes flight, all three band members are trapped inside the vortex. At least bassist Paul Webb seems to be having a laugh…

University of Cologne. As the band worked on the album, they employed an eclectic range of keyboard instrumentation, such as Mellotron and melodica. But they drew the line at modern synth technology.

"In terms of the first two albums and the live field, synths are simply an economic measure," Hollis told *Electronics And Music Maker* magazine in 1986. "Beyond that, I absolutely hate synthesizers… if they didn't exist, I'd be delighted."

It was a view reinforced by Friese-Greene, who was vehement on the subject of digital music technology. "To me, the idea of MIDI'ing up a piano is just plain sick. MIDI is a four-letter word, I can't take it seriously at all. There's really nothing printable I can say about it."

In the year preceding the recording of *The Colour Of Spring*, Talk Talk spent nine months on tour. Hollis always highlighted the enjoyment that the band got from the "immediacy and excitement" of playing live. But he stressed that recording remained paramount. "We're not interested in dashing off a few tracks which will be forgotten in a couple of months," he said. "When you're trying to achieve subtlety and depth in what you do, it takes time…"

The Colour Of Spring was released in March 1986 to widespread critical acclaim from all corners. For those who had already written the band off as bandwagon jumpers and derivative synth-pop has-beens, it was an unexpected revelation. Here was a genuine landmark release, ethereal and enigmatic with a haunting and fragile melancholy. Powerful, spacious rhythms combined with rich instrumental textures, all topped by Hollis' pained and deeply moving vocals.

Talk Talk had created a sound that defied genres, drawing on jazz, classical, folk and pop, yet without ever falling into one distinct style.

The Colour Of Spring went on to become the band's biggest-selling album, reaching No.8 in the UK charts. *Life's What You Make It*, with its rolling piano riff, was the album's sublime highlight, and became an international hit, expanding the band's global fanbase and earning Talk Talk their third US hit single.

Commercially, *The Colour Of Spring* would prove to be Talk Talk's most successful album, but for all its stellar achievements, their creative peak was yet to come. They would go on to release *Spirit Of Eden* and *Laughing Stock*, critically lauded works that many regard as their finest creative achievements.

> "WE'RE NOT INTERESTED IN DASHING OFF A FEW TRACKS THAT WILL BE FORGOTTEN IN A FEW MONTHS"
>
> MARK HOLLIS

Talk Talk disbanded in 1992 and Mark Hollis retired from music, choosing instead to live quietly with his wife and family in Wimbledon. Save for a self-titled debut album and a handful of appearances over the years, that's precisely what he did.

In an interview in 1982, Hollis remarked that: "I want to write stuff that you'll be able to listen to in 10 years' time". With *The Colour Of Spring*, and the two albums that followed, he produced a breathtaking body of work, one that will endure for a great deal longer than that.

Like all the best artists, Mark Hollis understood instinctively that what you leave out is often far more important than what you put in. "In some ways, I like silence more than I like sound," he said. He also recognised that technical proficiency is overrated. "To me, feel is the most important thing, not technique. Take all that soul and gospel stuff; that's got incredible feel, but it's not necessarily good musicianship." ▬

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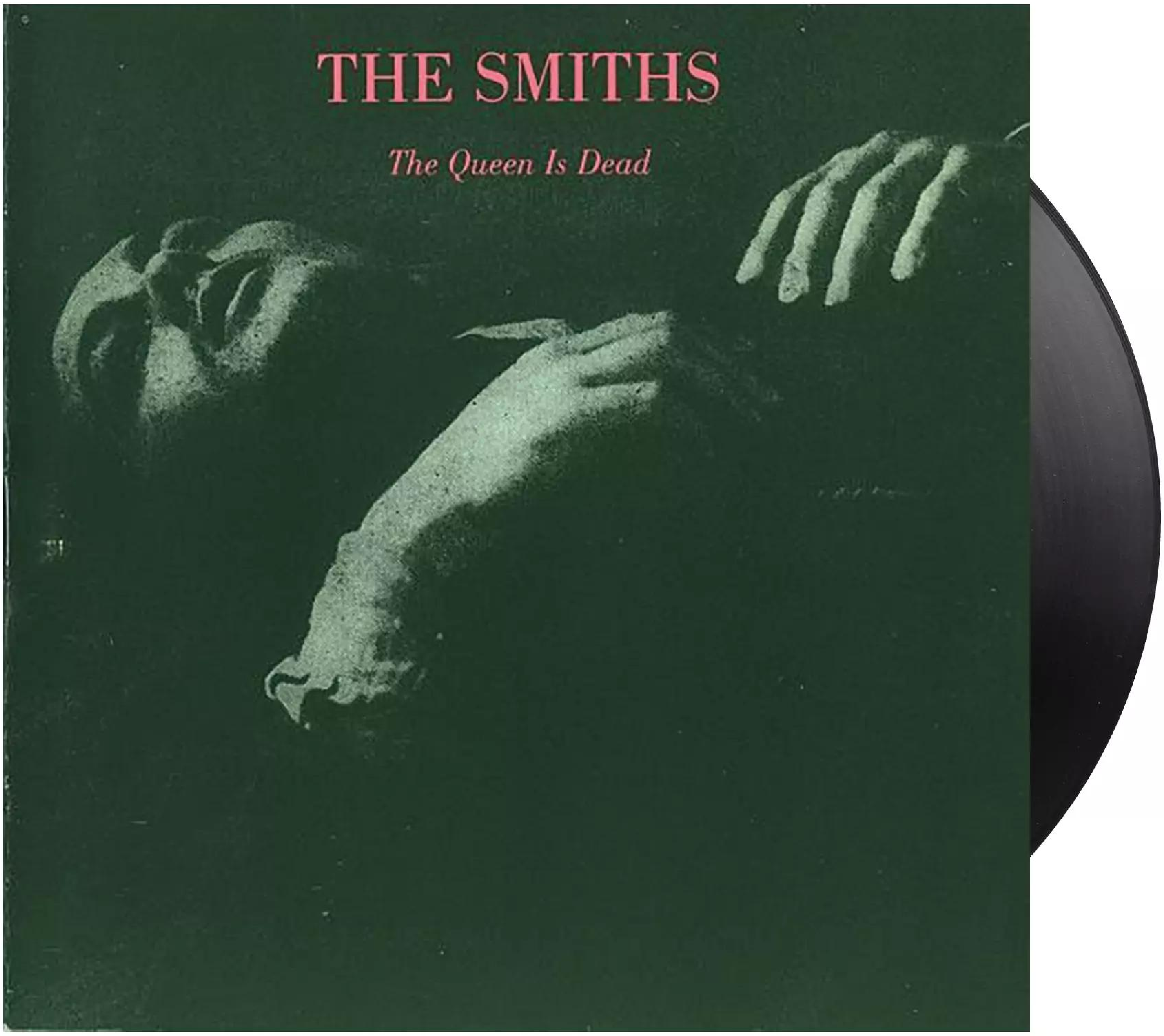


CLASSIC ALBUM

THE QUEEN IS DEAD
THE SMITHS

A MAJOR LEAP FORWARD IN THEIR SOUND, WITH MORRISSEY OFFERING UP HIS LYRICAL A-GAME. THE SMITHS' EXCEPTIONAL THIRD ALBUM HELD TWO OF THE GROUP'S FINEST CREATIONS.

STEVE O'BRIEN

Second albums have it hard. The weight of expectation after an attention-grabbing debut can torpedo once-promising careers. After all, how many artists have shot their creative load on that inaugural collection of songs, only to stumble when forced to deliver a hastily assembled follow-up? Third albums, in comparison, have it easy. Most of the time, the world's hardly waiting with bated breath for Record #3, which allows more daring artists a chance to go off-map a little. Third albums have given us *A Hard Day's Night*, *OK Computer*, *The Seeds Of Love*, *The Colour Of Spring* and *Screamadelica*, albums that took a giant step forward in terms of songwriting ambition and sound. So it was with The Smiths' tertiary release, an LP routinely cited as the Manc outfit's chef-d'œuvre. As recently as 2013, the *NME* named *The Queen Is Dead* No.1 in their 500 Greatest Albums Of All Time rundown, while even the normally American-biased *Rolling Stone* declared it the 113th best album ever on their 2020 Top 500 list, enthusing that "Morrissey's maudlin moanings have never been more acidic or self-aware."

It's worth remembering that *The Queen Is Dead* landed in record stores just two years and four months after their mild-mannered debut. Critics routinely talk of the huge creative leaps made by The Beatles over the course of their brief life, but ignore the equally dizzying growth of The Smiths. That the song *The Queen Is Dead*, with its dense sonic swirls, epic running time (it clocks in at 6:24) and bold, tabloid-baiting lyrics, came so shortly after the relatively uncomplicated *What Difference Does It Make?* and *This Charming Man* is remarkable by any standards.

© Getty

THE SONGS

① THE QUEEN IS DEAD

This fiery anti-monarchist epic was inspired by the release of *VU*, a then-fresh album of previously unreleased Velvet Underground tracks. "It's The Smiths does The Stooges does The Velvet Underground," Marr explained to the *NME* in 2016 about this song's 60s grungy influences. Despite its dark title and dense sound, it contains some of Morrissey's funniest, most playful lyrics – "She said, 'Eh, I know and you cannot sing!'/ I said, 'That's nothing, you should hear me play piano!'"

② FRANKLY, MR. SHANKLY

A deceptively upbeat track, this song skewers mundane work life and pompous authority figures (allegedly Rough Trade boss Geoff Travis). Morrissey's tongue-in-cheek resignation letter to 'Mr. Shankly' brims with sardonic humour, as he laments fame's hollow promises and bureaucratic drudgery. According to Marr, Morrissey wrote to Linda McCartney asking her to play piano on it. She said no.

③ I KNOW IT'S OVER

The cliche of The Smiths is of bleak miserablists and this one of the few that confirms the stereotype, Morrissey singing despairingly about being jilted for "a loutish lover". The trumpet you hear on it was producer Stephen Street's idea. "I thought it was pretty cool," he told *NME*, "but I think Morrissey felt uncomfortable at the time, having someone on the record who wasn't in The Smiths. I liked it – the trumpet sounded quite sad."

④ NEVER HAD NO ONE EVER

According to Marr, this one was written to echo "the atmosphere of being in the bedroom of my parents' house when I was 16, listening to *Raw Power* by The Stooges." That should come as a surprise to anyone who's heard this one, as it couldn't sound more different to Iggy's band's third album. Morrissey, meanwhile, wrote the lyrics about about not feeling at ease on the streets of Manchester, telling *Melody Maker*: "It was a constant confusion to me why I never really felt, 'This is my patch. This is my home. I know these people. I can do what I like, because this is mine.' It never was. I could never walk easily."

⑤ CEMETRY GATES

A witty, literate number (albeit misspelled), this song blends humour with melancholy, while name-dropping his heroes Keats, Yeats and Wilde with playful swagger. Marr's bright, chiming guitar lifts the mood, while the rhythm section keeps things sprightly. The cemetery setting adds a gothic touch, reflecting on mortality and art's permanence. "It's all the best elements of The Smiths," Street told the *NME*. "And what a wonderful vocal and lyric. It's a nice bit of blessed relief. It's delicate, but it's still got power."

⑥ BIGMOUTH STRIKES AGAIN

A punk-charged media critique, cut at RAK in 1985. Kirsty MacColl sang backing vocals on this, only for her contribution to be excised from the record. Instead, the high-pitched voice you hear on the record is Morrissey's, sped up beyond all recognition. Marr would later reveal to *Guitar Player* that the song was inspired by a *Rolling Stones* classic: "With *Bigmouth Strikes Again*, I was trying to write my *Jumpin' Jack Flash*," he revealed. "I wanted something that was a rush all the way through, without a distinct middle eight as such."

⑦ THE BOY WITH THE THORN IN HIS SIDE

Asked on *The Tube* what this one was about, Morrissey replied: "The thorn is the music industry and all those people who never believed anything I said, tried to get rid of me and wouldn't play the records. So I think we've reached a stage where we feel: if they don't believe me now, will they ever believe me? What more can a poor boy do?" The first single released from the album, it made No.23.

⑧ VICAR IN A TUTU

An insignificant track for sure ("We had so many big songs, we thought it would be okay to come up with a couple of things that were a little more throwaway," Marr said), this still offers up some of Morrissey's finest lyrics, about a cross-dressing clergyman. "If anyone else was playing it," the late Andy Rourke told *NME*, "they'd get laughed off stage, but we made it sound great. You can't imagine Duran Duran playing something like that, can you?"

③ THERE IS A LIGHT THAT NEVER GOES OUT

The album's third and final single, it's a song that was a favourite of Marr's with the guitarist telling *Select* in 1993: "I didn't realise that *There Is A Light That Never Goes Out* was going to be an anthem but when we first played it I thought it was the best song I'd ever heard." Containing some of Morrissey's most quoted lyrics ("And if a double-decker bus/ Crashes into us/ To die by your side/ Is such a heavenly way to die" still get the audience singing along at his solo gigs), it's currently the most streamed Smiths song on Spotify. Beat that, *How Soon Is Now?*

③ SOME GIRLS ARE BIGGER THAN OTHERS

"The whole idea of womanhood is something that to me is largely unexplored," Morrissey told *NME*. "I'm realising things about women that I never realised before and [this song] is just taking it down to the basic absurdity of recognising the contours to one's body. The fact that I've scuttled through 26 years of life without ever noticing that the contours of the body are different is an outrageous farce!"

It wasn't by accident. In his autobiography *Set The Boy Free*, Johnny Marr described the aspirations that he and Morrissey had going into their third record. "It occurred to me one afternoon that the next Smiths album had to be a serious piece of work," he wrote in 2016. Aware that the band were now being talked about in the same exalted terms as groups like The Who and The Rolling Stones, it struck him that "the next album had to be the best I could possibly do." The stakes, he went on, "had got higher" and "greatness was a possibility for the band if we were prepared to go for it."

And go for it they did. Mike Joyce would recall in the book *Morrissey & Marr: The Severed Alliance* that the guitarist "became insular and detached himself from me and Andy", while Marr revealed that the pressure of making The Smiths' third LP edged him into a depression. "I lost loads of weight and was very skinny and unhealthy," he told author Johnny Rogan, adding that "*The Queen Is Dead* was very difficult."

Though Morrissey and Marr knew that they had a world-beating arsenal of songs, the recording of *TQID* would be blighted by legal issues. The band's newly acquired lawyer informed them that the contract they'd inked with Rough Trade would be expiring with their third album and the group were advised that it was time to sign to a major. "It was a big

THE VIDEOS

THE BOY WITH THE THORN IN HIS SIDE
Directed by Ken O'Neill, the promo for The Smiths' first single off *The Queen Is Dead* (and the only one to get an official music video) is about as basic as it gets, with the band filmed performing the song in a studio recording room. That said, the group have never looked better, with Morrissey decked out in a blousy purple shirt and a gravity-defying quiff, and Marr appearing impossibly handsome in a dark gray cardi. Not groundbreaking, but a simple video to show off one of The Smiths' very best songs.

situation," Marr would later write, "and a lot to take in."

It wasn't a suggestion that received much pushback. Morrissey in particular blamed the label for the underperformance of *Shakespeare's Sister*, a release that didn't even crack the Top 20, while *The Boy With The Thorn In His Side*, a song that was eventually tracklisted on *The Queen Is Dead*, but recorded before the majority of the album, would peak at No.23. Rough Trade, the singer decided, hadn't done enough to push either single.

The truth is, The Smiths had outgrown Rough Trade, and Marr was becoming increasingly frustrated by the limitations of being on a modest indie label.

"The main thing was that studio time was always at a minimum, and for me that was a bit of a problem," the guitarist explained to *The Quietus* in 2010. "John Porter [producer of the band's debut album] and I were always leaving the studio at 9 or 10am, really under the gun."

The recording of *The Queen Is Dead* went smoothly enough. Recorded at a variety of locations, including London's RAK Studios, Drone in Manchester, and Jacobs Studios in Surrey, it reunited the band with producer Stephen Street, who they'd first worked with on *Meat Is Murder*. "They really were on a roll by then," Street reflected to milocostudios.com. "They hadn't stopped touring. After *Meat Is Murder*, we were in quite quickly recording tracks for *The Queen Is Dead*. It wasn't recorded in one go – a little bit was recorded in the summer, then we had a break while they toured, and then we went back in again in the winter."

Marr's creative horsepower was at full strength during the recording of *The Queen Is Dead*, but it came at a price. Maybe it was the sheer effort of attempting to top *Meat Is Murder*, as well as knowing that a storm was brewing regarding their relationship with Rough Trade that caused his weight to plummet to just seven stone. "I pushed myself and didn't dare let the intensity stop for a minute," he wrote in *Set The Boy Free*. "I rarely thought about food unless it was absolutely necessary."

> "I PUSHED MYSELF AND DIDN'T DARE LET THE INTENSITY STOP FOR A MINUTE. I RARELY THOUGHT ABOUT FOOD UNLESS NECESSARY."
>
> JOHNNY MARR

Towards the end of recording, the band's lawyer turned up again. Though he'd informed Rough Trade that *The Queen Is Dead* would be the last album for the label it turned out that he'd got it wrong when he'd told the group their contract was to expire with their third album. "We discovered that even though they'd been given notice, Rough Trade did in fact have more records due to them," wrote Marr. The result was that the label slapped an injunction on the album, delaying its release indefinitely. The news, Marr reflected, "was devastating."

"If I had felt that Rough Trade had let The Smiths down in any fundamental way, I'd have probably said, fine, goodbye and good luck," label boss Geoff Travis said in the book *Document And Eyewitness: An Intimate History Of Rough Trade*. "But I was convinced we had done a brilliant job for them – not always in the most ideal of circumstances in the sense that there was always an absence of management, which meant we were often their unpaid management by default."

Having finished the album, the band had no idea when it was going to come out, or even *if* it was to come out. With no tours booked and no promotional duties on their to-do lists, Morrissey and Marr took advantage of the time off by making pilgrimages to record shops, from Brighton to Morecambe, in an effort to track down rare 60s and 70s 45s. They also played the first Red Wedge show (a concert organised by Billy Bragg to show support for the Labour Party) at Manchester's Apollo, a performance that seems oddly out of step with Morrissey's later lurch to the right.

With the stalemate over *The Queen Is Dead* hanging over the band, Marr decided to do something drastic. On a spur, he drove all the way from Manchester to Jacob's Studios in Surrey in the middle of the night to take hold of the mastertapes. Finding the front door unlocked he crept in and made his way to the store cupboard, where the tapes were kept. Suddenly a light came on. It was one of the studios' owners, who asked: "Hello Johnny, what are you doing here?"

"Hi Tim," Marr replied. "I've come for our tapes."

The owner told the guitarist he couldn't let them go. Not only was he unwilling to get involved in any legal dispute, but the studio bill for the album had yet to be paid.

Disappointed, Marr got back into his car for the drive back to Manchester, this most rock'n'roll of acts sadly foiled.

Eventually, an agreement was made with Rough Trade, with the band consenting to record one more album for the label. That freed them to start planning *The Queen Is Dead*'s release, with Morrissey getting to work on its now-iconic sleeve. The Smiths' singular, 60s-leaning cover art was an essential piece of the Smiths brand, as fundamental to fans' understanding of the band as the songs themselves. Previous sleeves had depicted such figures as the actor Jean Marais (from the film *Orphée*), *Coronation Street*'s Pat Phoenix and football pools winner Viv Nicholson. *For The Queen Is Dead*, the singer zeroed in on a still of French actor Alain Delon from the 1964 noir classic *The Unvanquished*. Though Delon had granted his permission, he later told Morrissey – as recounted in *Autobiography* – that his parents had been upset "that anyone would call an album *The Queen Is Dead*."

The Smiths' third album was released on 16 June 1986, to mostly warm reviews. "If nothing else," gushed *Spin*, "it demonstrates the most admirable trait about The Smiths and about Brit rock in general – the wonderful breeding and development of those two-

© Getty

The Smiths headline Brixton Academy in October 1986

headed songwriting units. There's something inspiring about these UK teams – Lennon and McCartney, Lennox and Stewart, Jagger and Richards, Godley and Creme – these bonded mates who seem to weather thick and thin for the sake of the song." *Smash Hits*' Tom Hibbert, however, thought the album was more of a mixed bag, taking aim at what he thought were Morrissey's schoolboy politics. "The guitars are great," he wrote, adding, "some of the words are marvellous, others like scratchings on a Fifth Form desk."

In the years since, however, *The Queen Is Dead* has only ballooned in repute. An immovable fixture on Greatest Albums Of The 80s, and indeed Of All-Time lists, it seems almost a journalistic sin not to award it five stars in any retrospective write-up. That it didn't quite take the No.1 spot in the UK (*Meat Is Murder* was the band's only homegrown chart-topper) seems irrelevant – who ever talks about the record that kept *The Queen Is Dead* from the summit, Genesis' *Invisible Touch*, now?

Of course, as sublime as the music was and as literate and comic and subversive as those lyrics were, it's that title that still enthralls, one that manages to be absolutely emblematic of The Smiths, a name both funny and relishably provocative.

"Only when we decided to name the album *The Queen Is Dead* did I think it was kinda dangerous," Morrissey related to the *NME* in 2011. "It was just part of our mindset to be honest. We didn't have a concept before we did it, it just felt like part of our world. But when I thought about those four words put together as an album title it started to be somewhat conceptual and that concept was obviously incredibly English and incredibly defiant."

The band's masterpiece? Though Johnny Marr is more fond of its follow-up *Strangeways, Here We Come*, *The Queen Is Dead* has become the people's favourite Smiths album. Outside of compilations *Complete* and *The Sound Of The Smiths*, it's *The Queen Is Dead* which has built up the most Spotify listens, and it's one of its tracks, *There Is A Light That Never Goes Out*, that holds the title of the most-streamed Smiths song. Three, it turns out, really was the magic number for Messrs Morrissey, Marr, Rourke and Joyce in the summer of 1986. ■

Image: Getty

1986
TOP 40
SINGLES

A YEAR OF INCREDIBLE VARIETY, SUPERSTAR RETURNS AND PLENTY OF NEW ARTIST BREAKTHROUGHS, 1986 OFFERED A FASCINATING MENU OF POP. *CLASSIC POP* PICKS OUT THE FINEST MUSICAL MOMENTS OF THE YEAR.

ALISTAIR POWELL

What a year for pop. And a pretty weird one at that. With hi-NRG, synth-pop, soul, indie, hip-hop and dance, there was plenty on offer over 365 days that truly spanned the genres. It was the year that introduced hip-hop to the mainstream via Salt-N-Pepa, the Beastie Boys and Run DMC, while synth-pop held strong with Madonna hitting new heights, and Pet Shop Boys and Erasure making their bids for stardom. A reinvigorated Janet Jackson shot to the top with her finest album yet, just as darker elements trickled through, with Depeche Mode, Cocteau Twins and Siouxsie & The Banshees in stellar form. Guitars were omnipresent too via standout records from The Smiths, Crowded House and The Blow Monkeys. Whether it's the disco-ready sounds of Nu Shooz, the cascading charms of Diana Ross or the thunderous pop-goth stomp of Dr And The Medics, 1986 had something for everyone.

As always we're sticking to the rules of one track per artist, meaning a fair few classics have been left off. Room is, as ever, of a premium, meaning there's also numerous gems that missed the cut, including the likes of Five Star, Falco, Billy Bragg, They Might Be Giants, Talking Heads, Susanne Vega, Cameo, The B-52s, OMD, Sigue Sigue Sputnik, Love And Rockets, It Bites and Billy Ocean.

Feel free to send your own rundowns over to us, but in the meantime enjoy our Top 40 singles of 1986.

SPIRIT · IN · THE · SKY
DOCTOR & THE MEDICS

40

SPIRIT IN THE SKY

DR & THE MEDICS

An ostentatious 45 that was nigh on impossible to escape in spring-summer 1986, Dr & The Medics' stomping goth-glam cover of 1970 hit *Spirit In The Sky* was one of the year's most notorious No.1s. Kicking off with the fuzzing bass-led explosion of debut single *The Druids Are Here* (backed with *The Goats Are Trying To Kill Me*), these kabuki make-up-smearing misfits inked a major deal, cutting the hooky guitar-pop of *The Miracle Of The Age* with XTC's Andy Partridge, before going large with this novelty affair. It's good fun, if a little daft, but we'd be remiss to leave it out.

39

THE EDGE OF HEAVEN

WHAM!

With Wham! coming to an end after four years in the spotlight and George Michael's *A Different Corner* charming the masses at UK No.1, the duo chose this fizzy pop entry as their swansong and to promote their farewell compilation, *The Final*. Its racy lyrics were "deliberately and overtly sexual" – because, said George, "no one listens to a Wham! lyric". Issued alongside a reworked *Wham Rap!*, *Battlestations* and a cover version of Was (Not Was)'s *Where Did Your Heart Go?*, the throwaway, yet fun-filled *The Edge Of Heaven* became Wham!'s final UK No.1. A fitting farewell.

38

LOVE'S EASY TEARS

COCTEAU TWINS

Breathtaking, sublime, pioneering, cinematic… we'd easily be able to fill this entry entirely with superlatives, such is its hypnotic magnificence. Arriving on 4AD before their *Victorialand* LP via an EP of the same name, Scotland's ultimate purveyors of dream-pop showcased singer Liz Fraser's utterly unique vocal style and Robin Guthrie's ethereal guitars in the finest of lights on 1986's bewitching *Love's Easy Tears*. Guthrie's rolling riff drives the track, while Frazer's enigmatic, almost indecipherable verses seem to sketch out a failed romance, imploring a lover to listen. Whatever it's intended meaning, it's a thing of utter beauty.

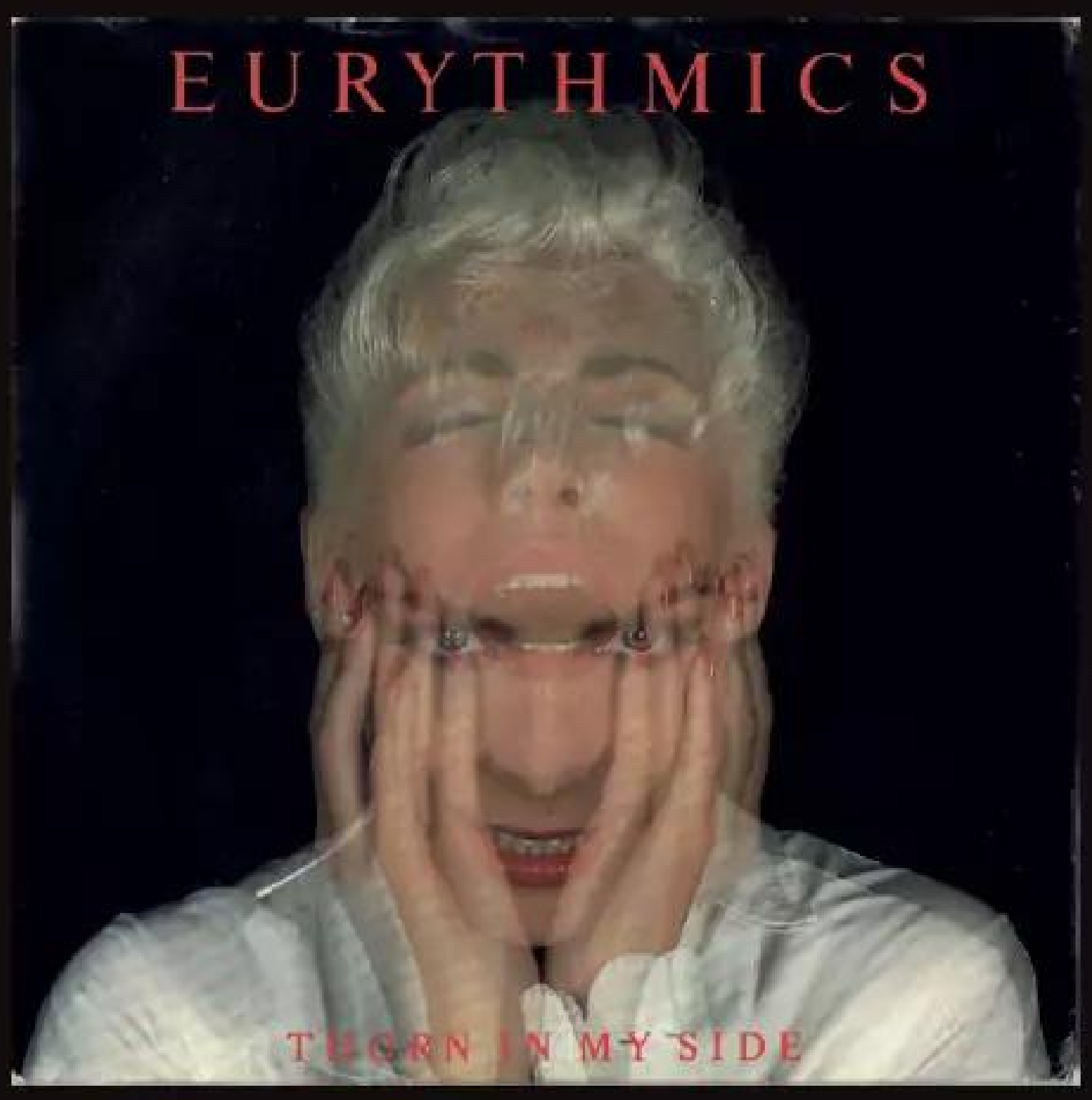
DAVID BOWIE
Absolute Beginners

34

ABSOLUTE BEGINNERS

DAVID BOWIE

Kept off the top spot by Diana Ross' mighty *Chain Reaction* and Cliff Richard and The Young Ones slightly less mighty take on *Living Doll*, the theme to the Julien Temple-directed film was developed from a half-finished demo, "That's Motivation". It came together after a veiled invitation sent out to a cast of top musicians by a mysterious "Mr X". And with the talent including Prefab Sprout's Kevin Armstrong, Attractions' keyboardist Steve Nieve and Rick Wakeman, it was completed at Abbey Road.



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THORN IN MY SIDE

EURYTHMICS

1983's double whammy of LPs, *Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)* and *Touch*, plus 1985's *Be Yourself Tonight* had ensured Eurythmics a place in the synth-pop big leagues. But as '86 came around, the duo altered course with fifth offering *Revenge*, whose rockier singles fared well albeit unable to repeat the No.1 success of *There Must Be An Angel*. *It's Alright (Baby's Coming Back)*, *The Miracle Of Love* and *Missionary Man* are all worthy, but it's the 60s-inspired *Thorn In My Side* that did best, a savage kiss off to an unfaithful lover. Their ninth UK Top 10.

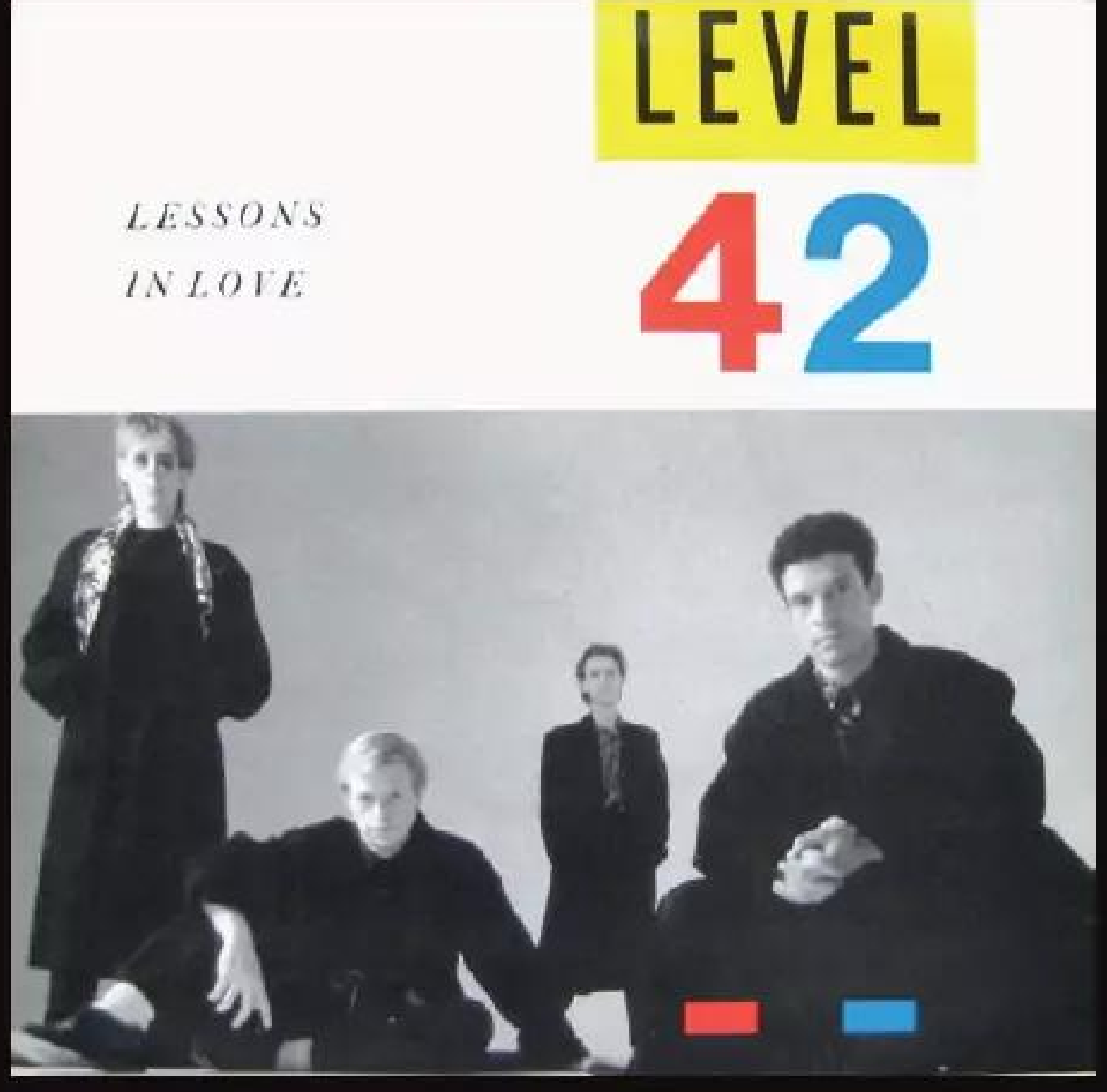
a-ha / i've been losing you

32

I'VE BEEN LOSING YOU

A-HA

Hunting High And Low's perennial *Take On Me* had won 1985, and *The Sun Always Shines On TV* had nailed the trio's colours to the mast. Where next for the Norwegian superstars? Second album *Scoundrel Days* was a departure from the pin-up synth-pop of their debut, instead delivering a classy set that illustrated there was far more to a-ha that chart-ready hooks. *I've Been Losing You* repped the LP beautifully, and as Morten Harkett sings "I have lost my way", it's a powerful addition to their catalogue, without losing any of their commercial appeal.



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LESSONS IN LOVE

LEVEL 42

Led by the percussive thumbs of their bass-mastering frontman Mark King, Brit jazz-funk collective Level 42 landed their biggest hit (UK No.3) with *Lessons In Love*, taken from their sophisticated seventh LP, *Running In The Family*. Begun as a live playout to their track *Physical Presence*, from previous album *World Machine*, the song was developed in late 1985 at King's home in Streatham with its '*Sergeant Pepper* chorus' added. Built via a monstrous bank of synths, what was for Q "one of the best singles of the 80s", is another unique addition to the year's musical menu.

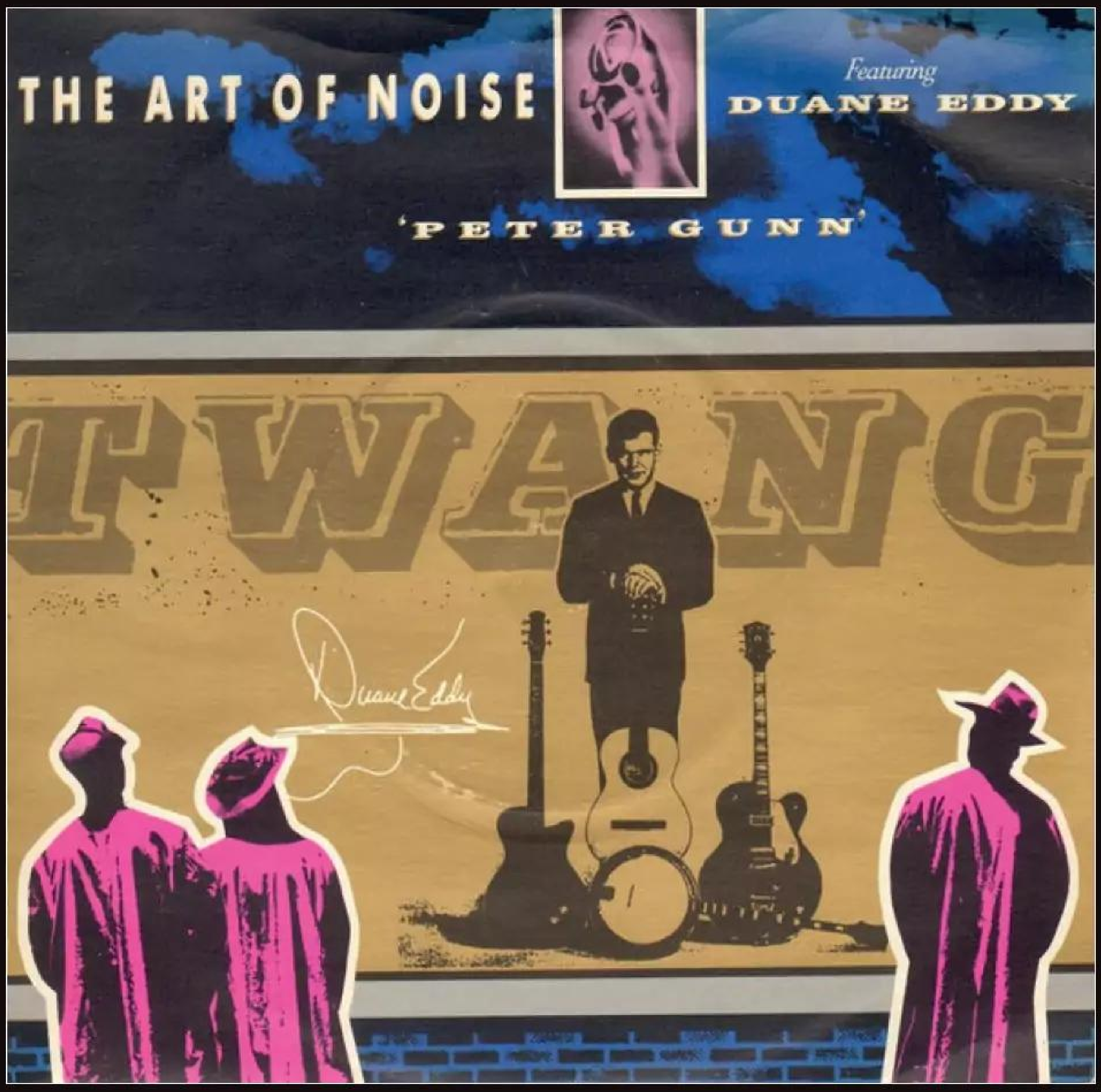
THE
PRETENDERS
DON'T
GET
ME
WRONG

36

DON'T GET ME WRONG

THE PRETENDERS

Opening the campaign for fourth album *Get Close*, *Don't Get Me Wrong* was written by Chryssie Hynde for – you cannot be serious! – her friend, tennis star John McEnroe. The 80s had been a rocky road for the band having lost two members to drugs, and by *Get Close*, Hynde had also let drummer Martin Chambers go. With a cast of sessioneers at her disposal, and with Robbie McIntosh still on guitar, Hynde was the sultry focus here. With a melody nabbed from an in-flight jingle, the track explored relationships and their many turbulent tides. The second biggest hit of their career.



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PETER GUNN

ART OF NOISE

Art Of Noise's sample-heavy, kitchen-sink cover of Henry Mancini's theme from the 1958 TV show was yet another outlier in a truly genre-spanning year. Plenty had taken it on before, from trumpeter Ray Anthony and The Kingsmen to Emerson, Lake & Palmer and Aretha Franklin. Its most infamous version, however, was a 1959 take from rockabilly guitar sensation Duane Eddy, enlisted by AON for their own 1986 reimagining. With Eddy's twang gelling with the electronics perfectly, this was by far its most unique reading, giving AON their first Hot 100 hit, and Eddy his first Billboard success in over two decades.

julian
cope
WORLD SHUT YOUR MOUTH

31

WORLD SHUT YOUR MOUTH

JULIAN COPE

Just clawing his way into the UK Top 20, "militant pacifist" Julian Cope, formerly of The Teardrop Explodes, addresses a protagonist seemingly wishing to turn their back on stardom – yet, ironically, this became his biggest hit, and his only Billboard Top 100. Cope is well publicised as despising fame and, as such, this is surely autobiographical, but nothing's even straightforward with the LSD-guzzling cult star. "Through his dedication to psychedelics," commented *Spin* in 1987, "Julian Cope has made questioning and bewilderment a veritable religion."

The Blow
Monkeys
DIGGING YOUR SCENE
45

30

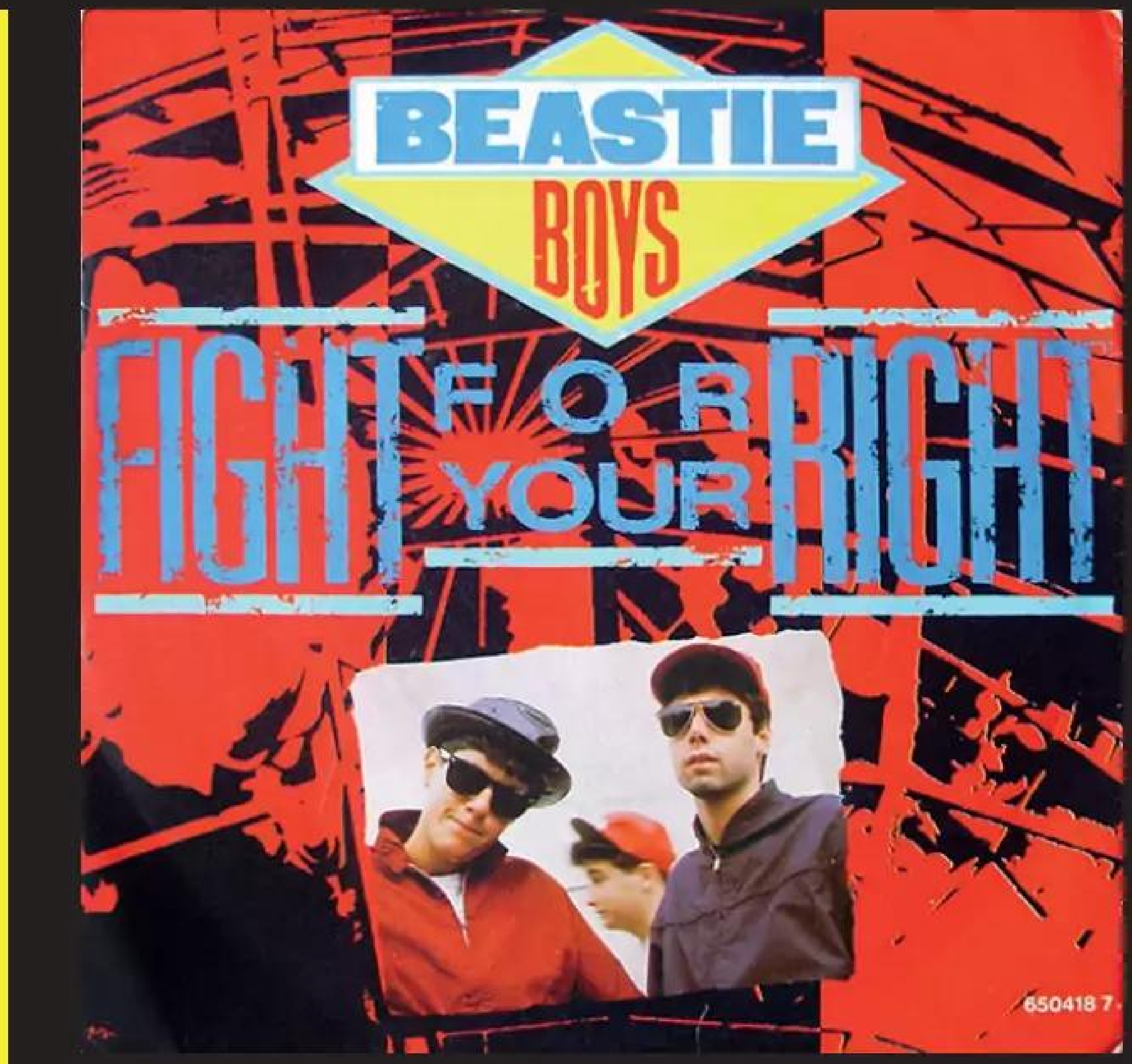
DIGGING YOUR SCENE

THE BLOW MONKEYS

Addressing the treatment of HIV and AIDS victims, Dr. Robert's finest moment combined R&B, jazz and soul for a glamorous veneer beneath which to vent. ""The soul side of my writing was coming to the fore," he says on their website. I'd read an article where Donna Summer said AIDS was God's revenge on homosexuals and I disagreed! The song itself was a homage to those gay clubs like Taboo that I used to go to – even though I'm not gay – because the music and the vibe was so good." Overlaid with LinnDrum, this stormed the UK charts and found US success.

> Addressing the treatment of HIV and AIDS victims, Dr. Robert's finest moment combined R&B, jazz and soul for a glamorous veneer beneath which to vent

> The "Full Horror" mix gives the full effect, with a darkened collage of synth, barking dogs and deadpan spoken-word, that breaks seamlessly into the sunshine hook that introduced Pet Shop Boys' classic evocation of the city's periphery



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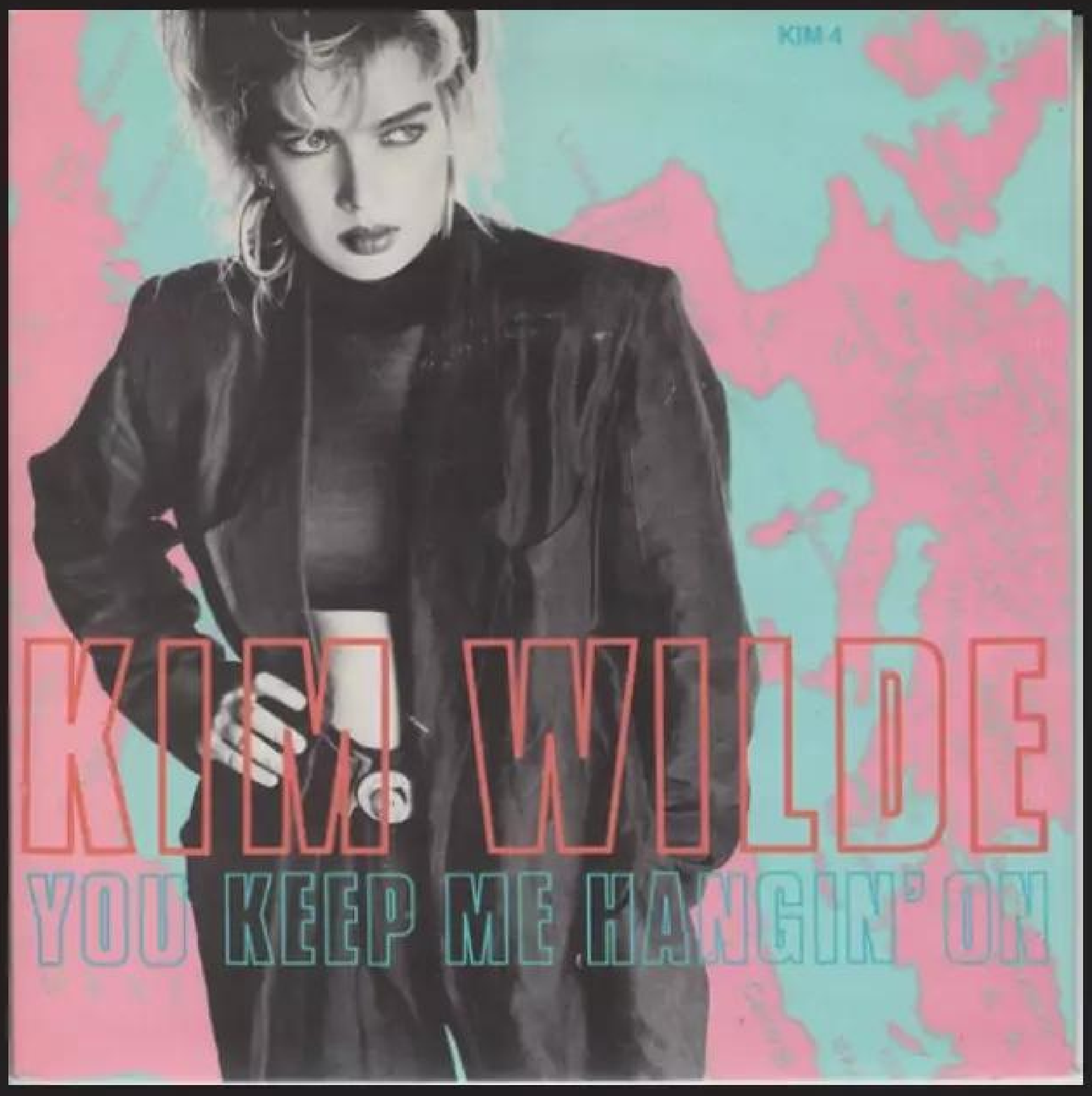
FIGHT FOR YOUR RIGHT

BEASTIE BOYS

Beastie Boys' breakthrough debut album *Licensed To Ill* combined NYC's punk and hip-hop scenes for a record that leapt out of the speakers, with highlights including the LP's other biggie, *No Sleep Til Brooklyn*. *Fight For Your Right*, written in just five minutes, was their biggest hit (US No.7). And yet the band themselves weren't into it, unhappy fans hadn't sussed that it was a parody of America's frat boy culture, despite soundtracking many-a beer bong. "There were tons of guys singing along to [*Fight for Your Right*] who were oblivious to the fact it was a total goof on them," moaned Mike D. "Irony is often missed."



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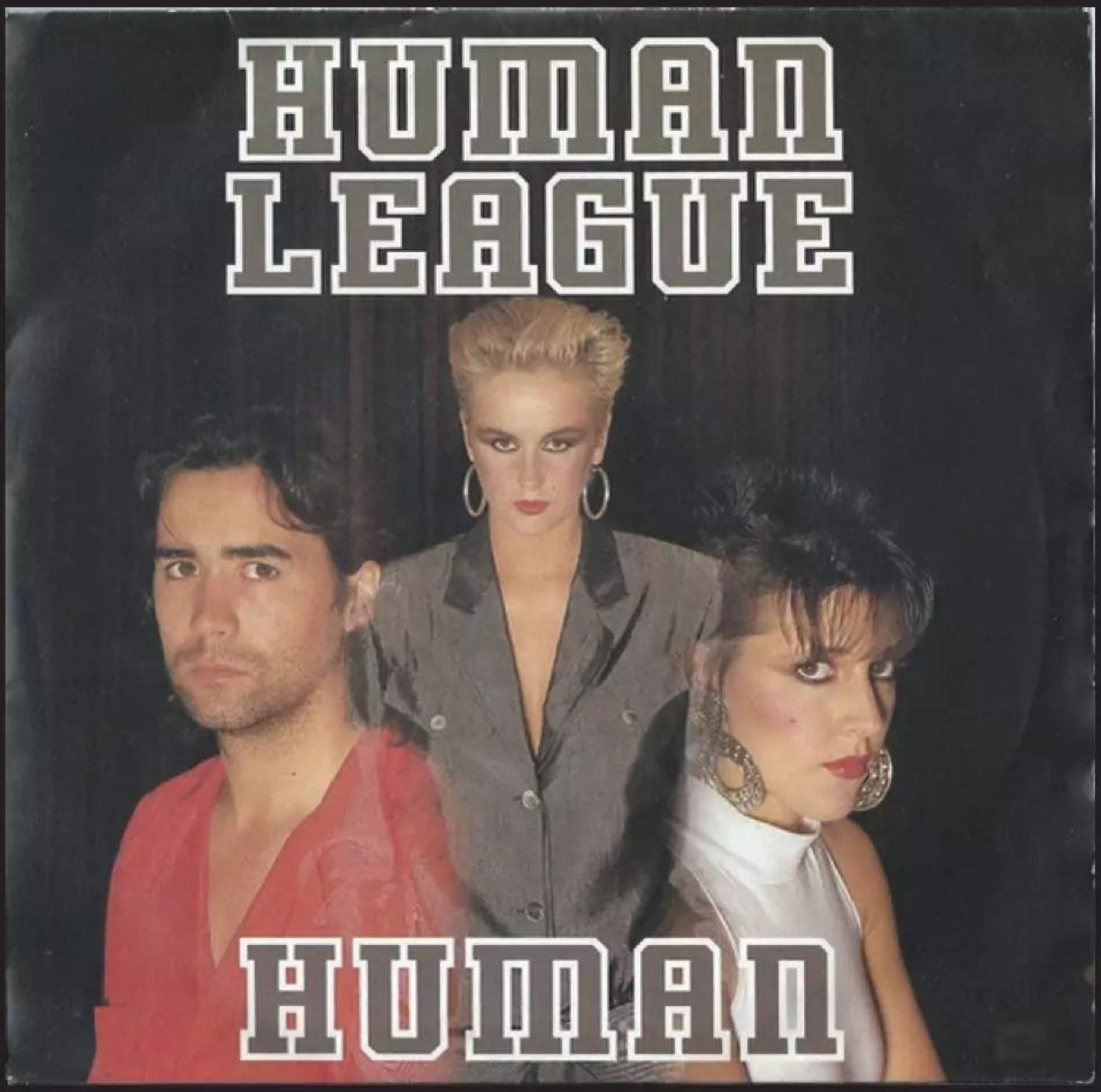
YOU KEEP ME HANGIN' ON

KIM WILDE

Plenty of artists have had a crack at The Supremes' Motown perennial over the years, from Welsh powerhouse Tom Jones to 60s psychedelic rockers Vanilla Fudge, but by far the best interpretation came from Kim Wilde, who released her synth-heavy, club-bound hi-NRG version as her big comeback single. And what a return it was, issued as the second single from her fifth album *Another Step*, and with the help of her brother Ricky behind the mixing desk, *You Keep Me Hangin' On* was a worldwide smash, giving her her first Billboard No.1 and just missing the UK summit.



23

HUMAN

THE HUMAN LEAGUE

A far smoother affair than The League's usual synth-riffing dance-pop, *Human* was written and produced by Minneapolis production duo Jam & Lewis, then riding high off the back of success with Janet Jackson. With straightforward lyrics concerning infidelity, Phil Oakey felt the track was his finest vocal performance. *NME* agreed, calling it "the most stylish thing they've done in years", while *Smash Hits* found a "beautifully crafted, warm and melodic tune". A second million-selling No.1, too.

NU SHOOZ
I CAN'T WAIT

22

I CAN'T WAIT

NU SHOOZ

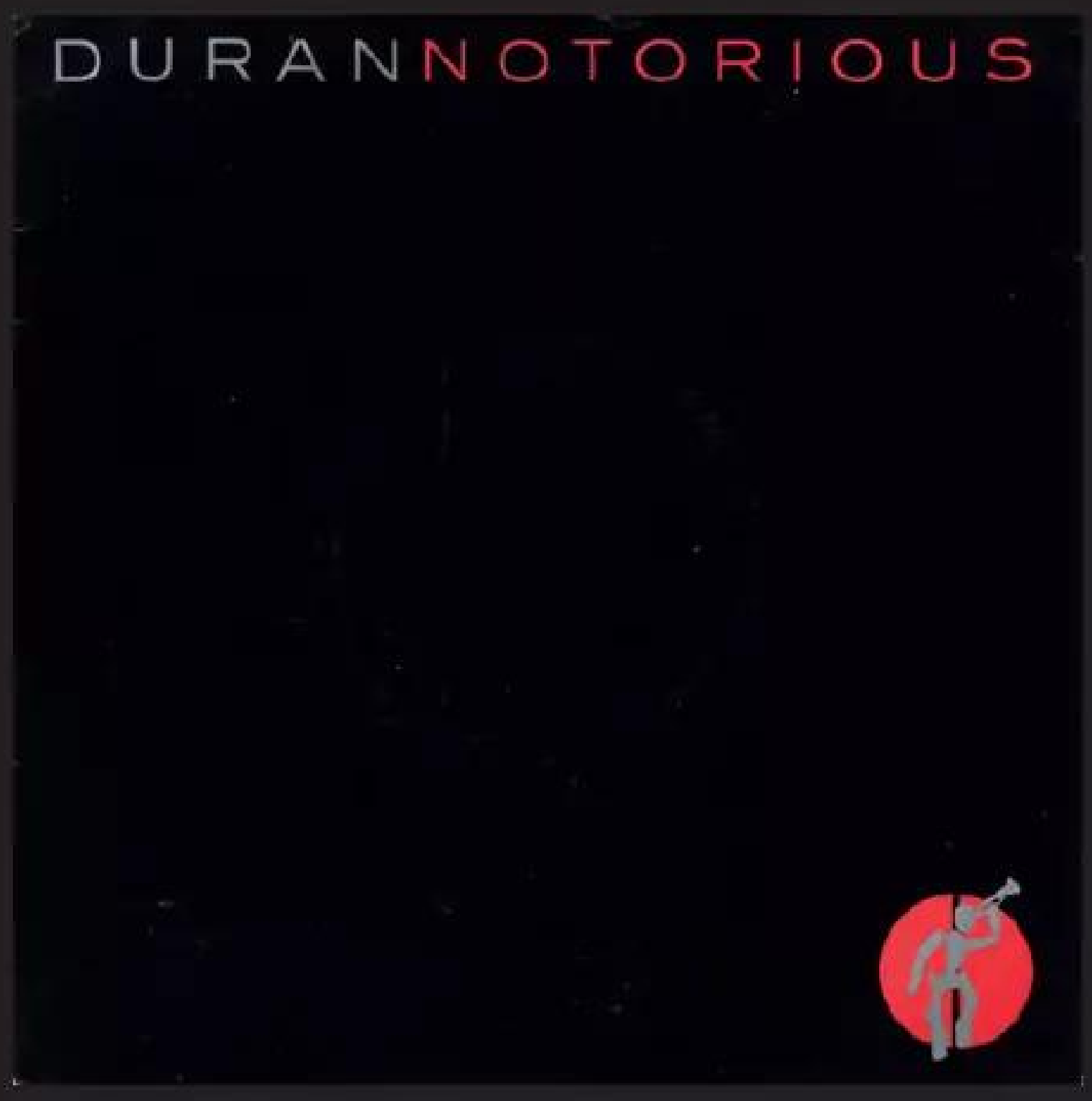
Fronted by husband-and-wife duo John Smith and Valerie Day, Nu Shooz poked their heads above the parapet with 1986 LP *Poolside*, and in particular with this disco-pop classic, remixed from the original released a few years prior. The 'American Mix' appeared on 1984's under-the-radar *Tha's Right* LP, but Peter Slaghuis' new-improved 'Dutch Mix' got them signed to Atlantic, was issued as a single and brought frontline success. What was for *Spin* "the perfect disco record" enabled a US No.3 and UK No.2 – a Grammy nomination followed.

21

RISE

PUBLIC IMAGE LTD

John Lydon is in typically biting form on this entry from PiL's fifth collection, *Album*. Previously titled "South African Song", *Rise* was a veiled attack on Apartheid and alleged Ulster police brutality, brought to life via a diverse guestlist that included guitar hero Steve Vai, Bill Laswell on fretless bass, L. Shankar on violin and US jazz drummer Tony Williams, whose colossal drum sound was captured at the foot of a New York elevator. "Once you start murdering your fellow human beings it's over," Lydon told *Mojo*. "Rise is about the stop of that."



27

NOTORIOUS

DURAN DURAN

With Taylors Roger and Andy departed, it was the now threepiece's "survival song", *Notorious*, that kept them afloat through those tough times. Injecting the funk, Chic's Nile Rodgers expert production and guitar prowess played a major part in the reinvention, enlisting the Borneo Horns for the session too. Add Simon Le Bon's deliciously defensive lyrics – "Lay your seedy judgements/ Who says they're part of our lives? – and the band had a global hit on their hands. Peaking at UK No.7 and US No.2, Duran proved they were still very much alive.

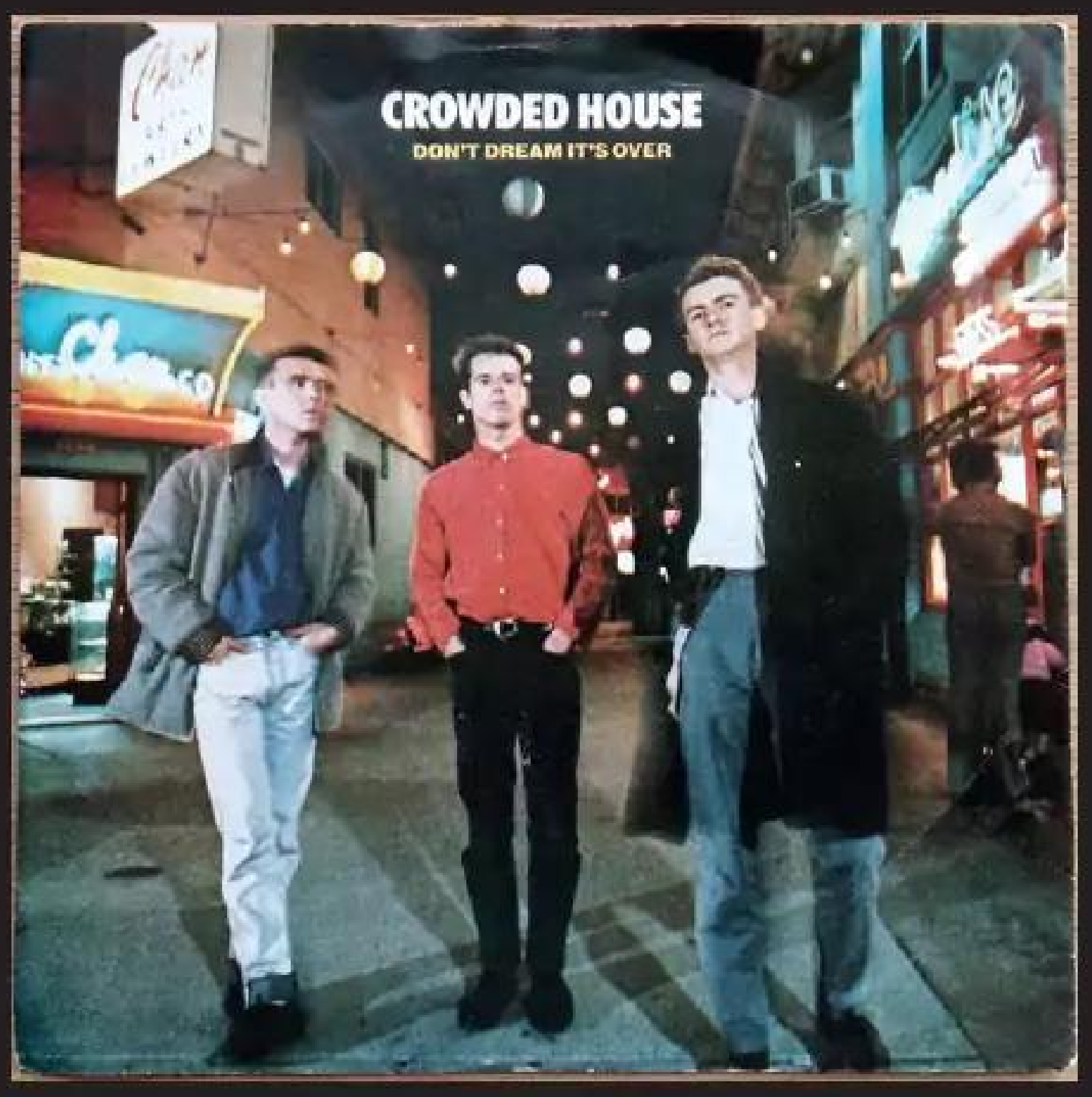
THE HOUSEMARTINS
Caravan of Love

26

CARAVAN OF LOVE

THE HOUSEMARTINS

The Housemartins' 1986 debut LP *London 0 Hull 4* held some superb moments, not least their jubilantly delivered jab at sexism in the workplace, *Happy Hour*, but it's their standalone a cappella No.1 cover of Isley-Jasper-Isley's *Caravan Of Love*, released early December, that makes the cut. The group were practised in the format, having often supported themselves on tour as The Fish City Five, singing close-harmony tunes (the 12" features more a cappella delights). Sadly for Paul Heaton and crew, Jackie Wilson's posthumous *Reet Petite* pipped them to the Yuletide crown.



25

DON'T DREAM IT'S OVER

CROWDED HOUSE

Neil Finn's ubiquitous mega-ballad was written on his brother's piano in a day with producer Mitchell Froom adding to its appeal via an R&B-leaning arrangement. "I was contemplating the end of things: relationships and the challenges that you face," Finn told *Spin*. "It's an exhortation to myself – and to anyone who's going through that." The band's biggest hit (UK No.25/US No.2), it won the top spot in Australia and in Finn's New Zealand homeland. The track made headlines when Finn performed the track with Dua Lipa in Auckland this April.

SIOUXSIE AND THE BANSHEES
CANDYMAN

24

CANDYMAN

SIOUXSIE AND THE BANSHEES

The album's shimmering lead satellite *Cities In Dust* had just missed the Top 20 at the end of 1985, setting the mood for the *Tinderbox* LP, and the uncompromising *Candyman* was of equal splendour. New guitarist John Valentine Carruthers drives this with sparkling arpeggios featuring heavily atop Budgie's pounding, propellant rhythm, while Sioux is as potent as ever. While many assumed its title to reference a drug dealer, this was not the case. "It's not anti-drug, it's anti-incest," retorted Siouxsie to *Creem*, herself a victim of abuse. A UK No.34.

20

SUBURBIA

PET SHOP BOYS

The "Full Horror" mix gives the full effect, with a darkened collage of synth, barking dogs and deadpan spoken-word, that breaks seamlessly into the sunshine hook that introduced PSB's classic evocation of the city's periphery. Taking inspiration from the unrest in Brixton and Penelope Spheeris' 1984 drama the same name, *Suburbia* was toughened up for the dancefloor with the help of producer Julian Mendelsohn from the softer version heard on the *Please* LP.

BANANARAMA
VENUS

19

VENUS

BANANARAMA

London's all-conquering pop trio, the 'Nanas transformed Shocking Blue's late-60s hit into a synth-pop classic with the help of producers Stock, Aitken and Waterman. The threesome had gigged the track for some time previous, and with Dead Or Alive's *You Spin Me Round* as inspiration, SAW's hi-NRG blueprint was the perfect fit. Not that the critics agreed, *Smash Hits*, *Music Week* and *Record Mirror* all giving it the thumbs down. Still, the public lapped it up, taking it into the UK Top 10, while in the US it became their first and only chart-topper.

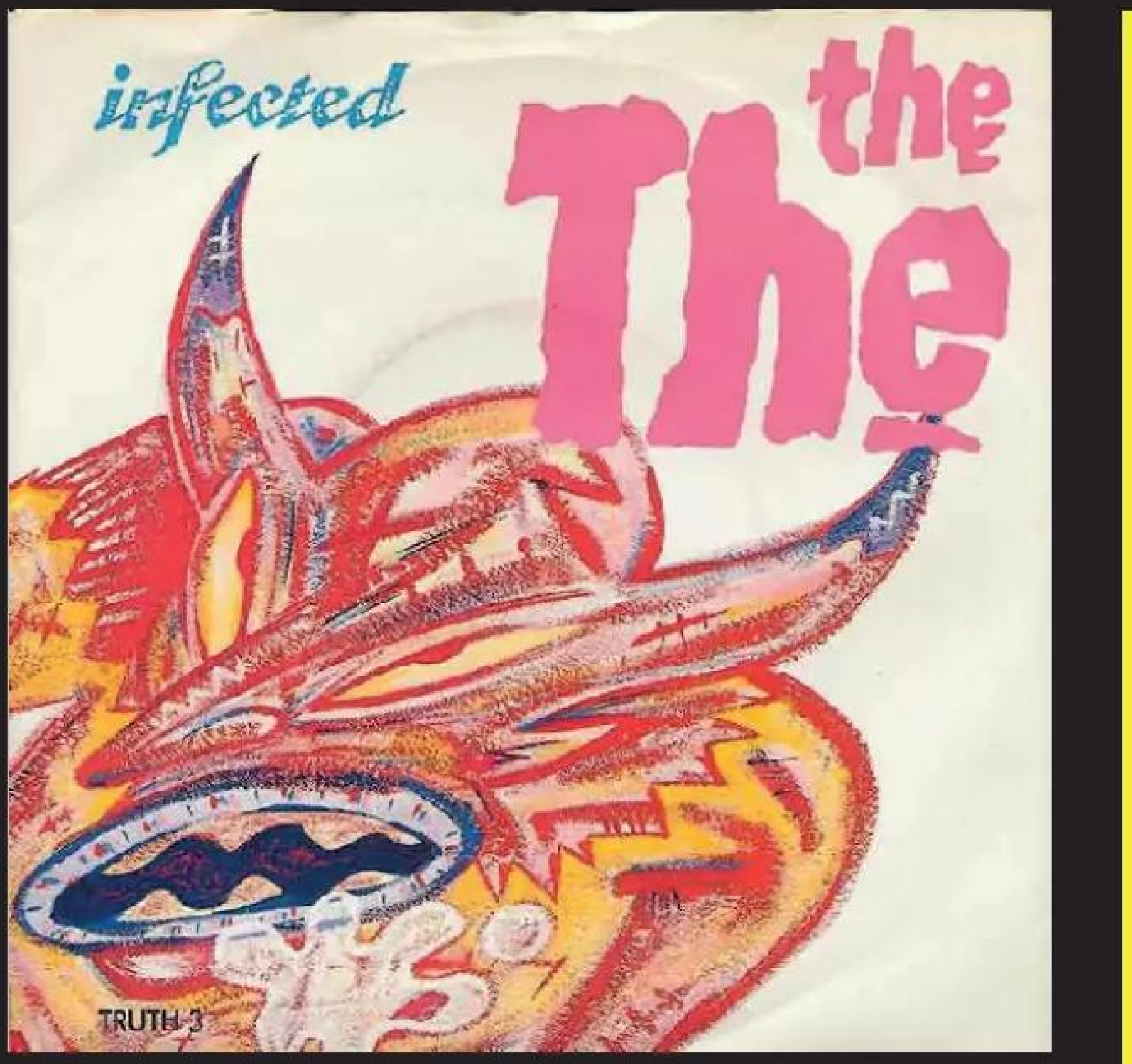
don't give up
Peter Gabriel
Kate Bush

18

DON'T GIVE UP

PETER GABRIEL & KATE BUSH

This could have sounded very different indeed. Penned with Queen Of Country Dolly Parton in mind as his duetting partner, when she politely declined, Peter Gabriel called on Kate Bush, who'd sung on *Games Without Frontiers*. Inspired by the bitter realities of Dust Bowl-era America, seen by Gabriel via Dorothea Lange's iconic photos, and by Maggie Thatcher's Britain, its origins trace back to 1981. Completed in time for fifth album *So*, and shortened for a radio edit, the track made the UK Top 10 and bagged Gabriel an Ivor Novello.



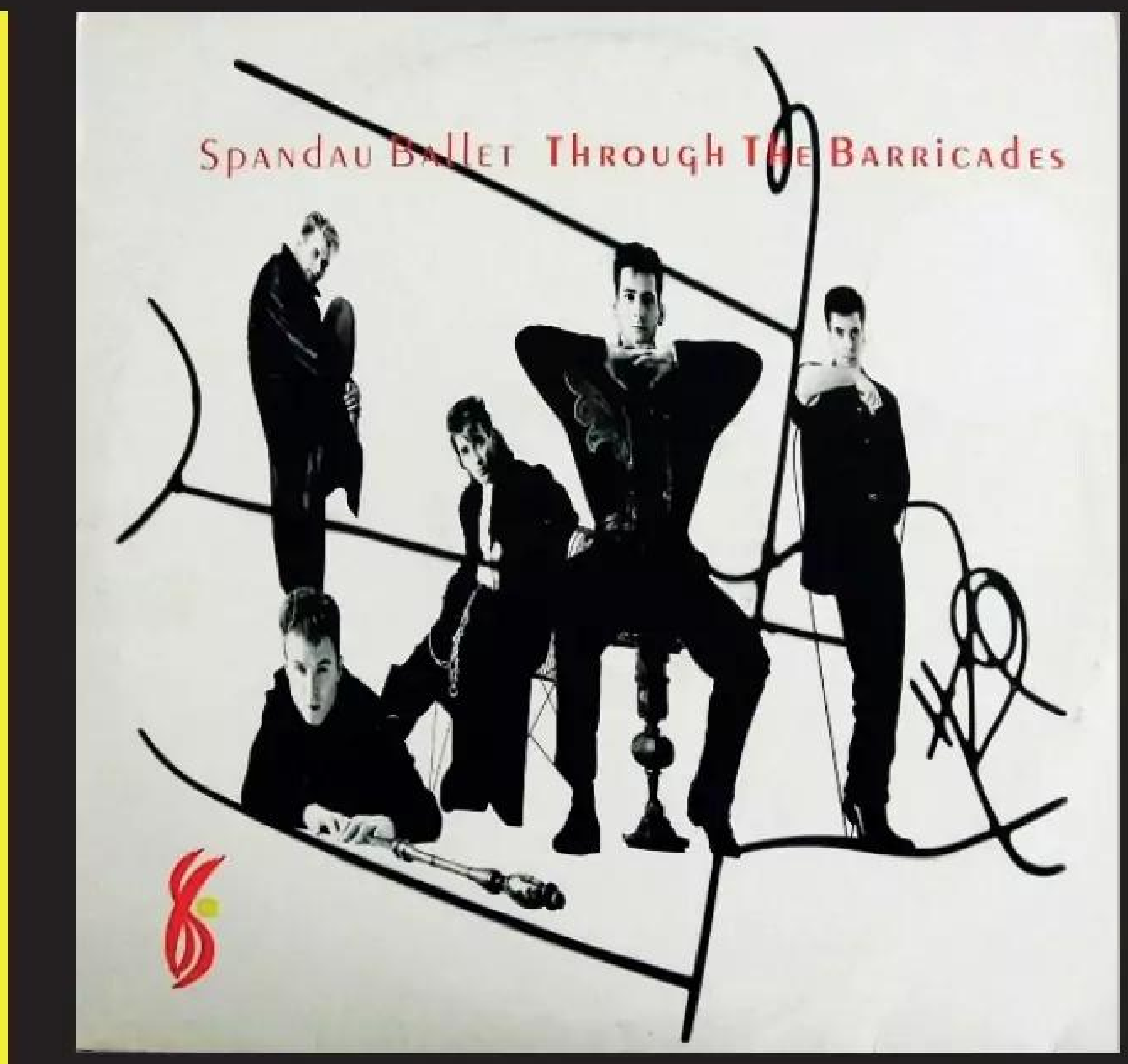
17

INFECTED

THE THE

The The's *Infected* LP had plenty of highlights, from lead single *Heartland*, Matt Johnson's ruthless lyrical assault on the Iron Lady's administration, to *Slow Train To Dawn*, a vocal spar with Neneh Cherry. But it's the title track that wins here, its hammering drum loop combining with a menacing bass to introduce Johnson's bristling delivery. Released at the height of the AIDs epidemic, it caused its fair share of controversy, from its title and chorus ("Infect me with your love") to its original, banned sleeve that featured a masterbating demon (a portion of which can be seen on the 7" sleeve above).

> Gary Kemp cleverly utilised a Romeo and Juliet-framed love story to illustrate a powerful picture of the Troubles – and those occurring closer to home within the band itself

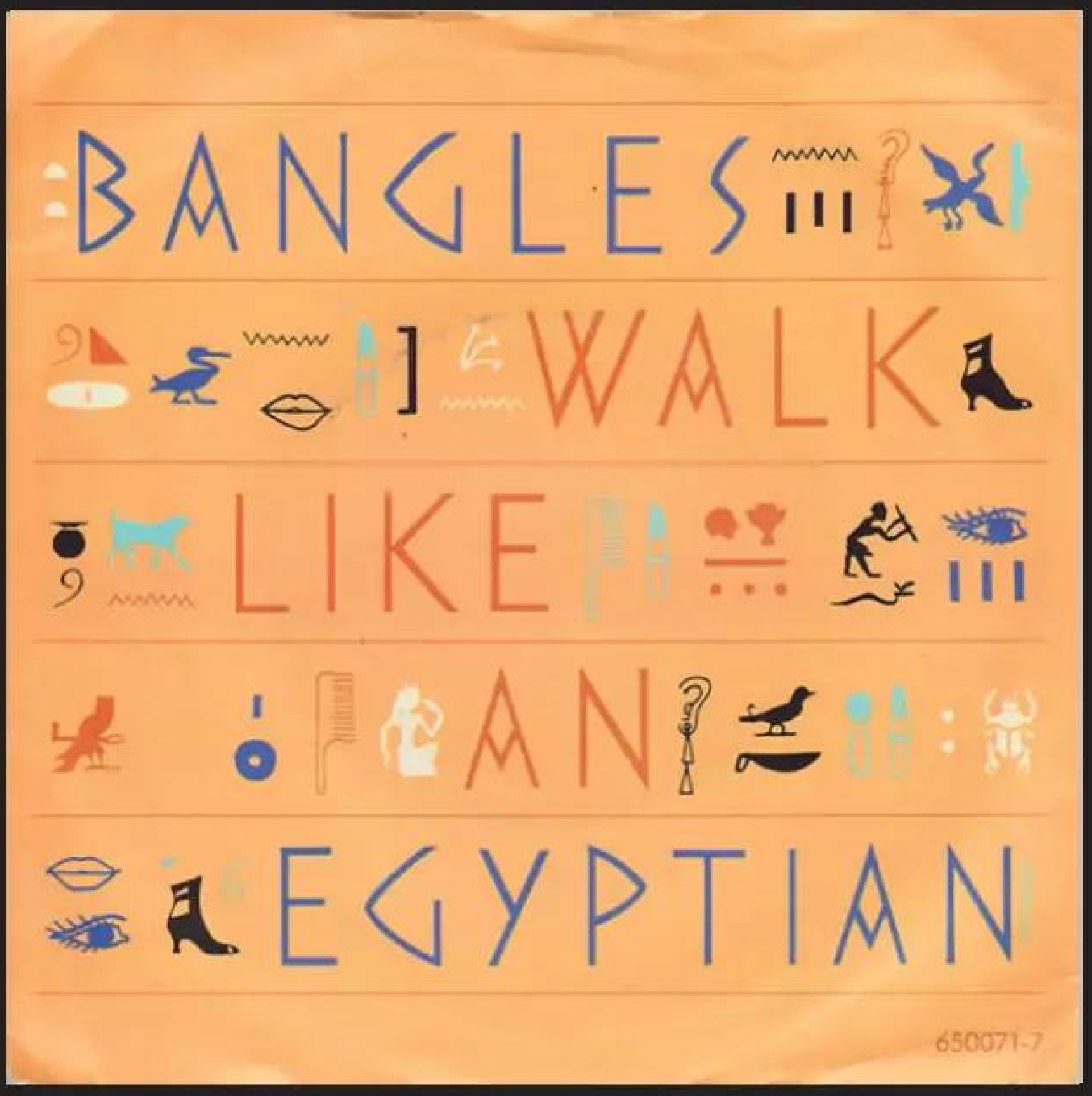

Spandau Ballet Through The Barricades

16

THROUGH THE BARRICADES

SPANDAU BALLET

Both Tony Hadley and Gary Kemp agree that the title track to Spandau's fifth album is a crowning moment. The ballad was written about the tragic death of their merch-seller, 23-year-old "Kidso" Reilly, shot from behind in West Belfast by a soldier in 1983 – the first British soldier to be convicted of murder while serving in Northern Ireland. Having met Kidso's brother, visited the grave and seen the barricades first hand, Kemp cleverly utilised a Romeo and Juliet-framed love story to illustrate a powerful picture of the Troubles – and those occurring closer to home within the band itself.



12

WALK LIKE AN EGYPTIAN

THE BANGLES

The Bangles were on fire in 1986 having broken through with the previous year's Prince-penned *Manic Monday*, a UK No.3 and US No.1. While in the studio, it was felt that a second song of equal proportions was needed. Originally spurned by both Toni Basil and Lene Lovich, the band also resisted Liam Sternberg's *Walk Like An Egyptian* at first, Debbi Peterson feeling it was no more than a "dumb song". Eventually succumbing to producer David Kahne's persuasion, the track would give them their first UK No.1, with Kahne's whistle hook making an appearance.

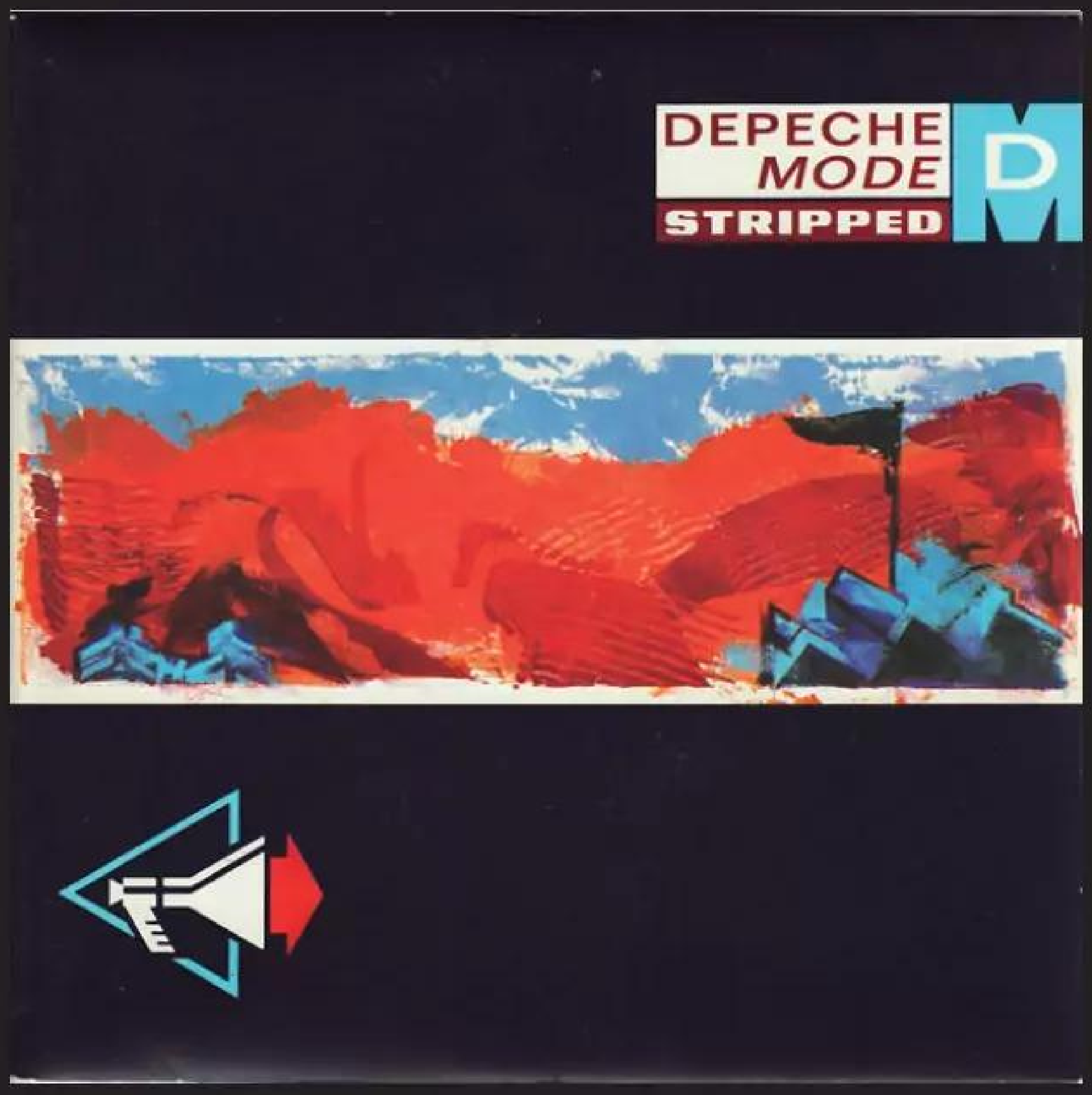
ROSS
Chain Reaction

11

CHAIN REACTION

DIANA ROSS

Written for Diana Ross by the Bee Gees and featuring Barry Gibb (who also produced it), this steamy second Motown-leaning offering from Ross' 16th LP, *Eaten Alive*, was a mammoth single for the year. With the brothers Gibb inspired by songwriters Holland-Dozier-Holland and their vocals also featuring prominently, *Chain Reaction*'s arrangement climbed ever higher throughout to rousing, cascading effect. While it strangely bombed in her homeland, it bossed the UK, reaching No.1 for a three-week stay, her biggest UK seller and final No.1.

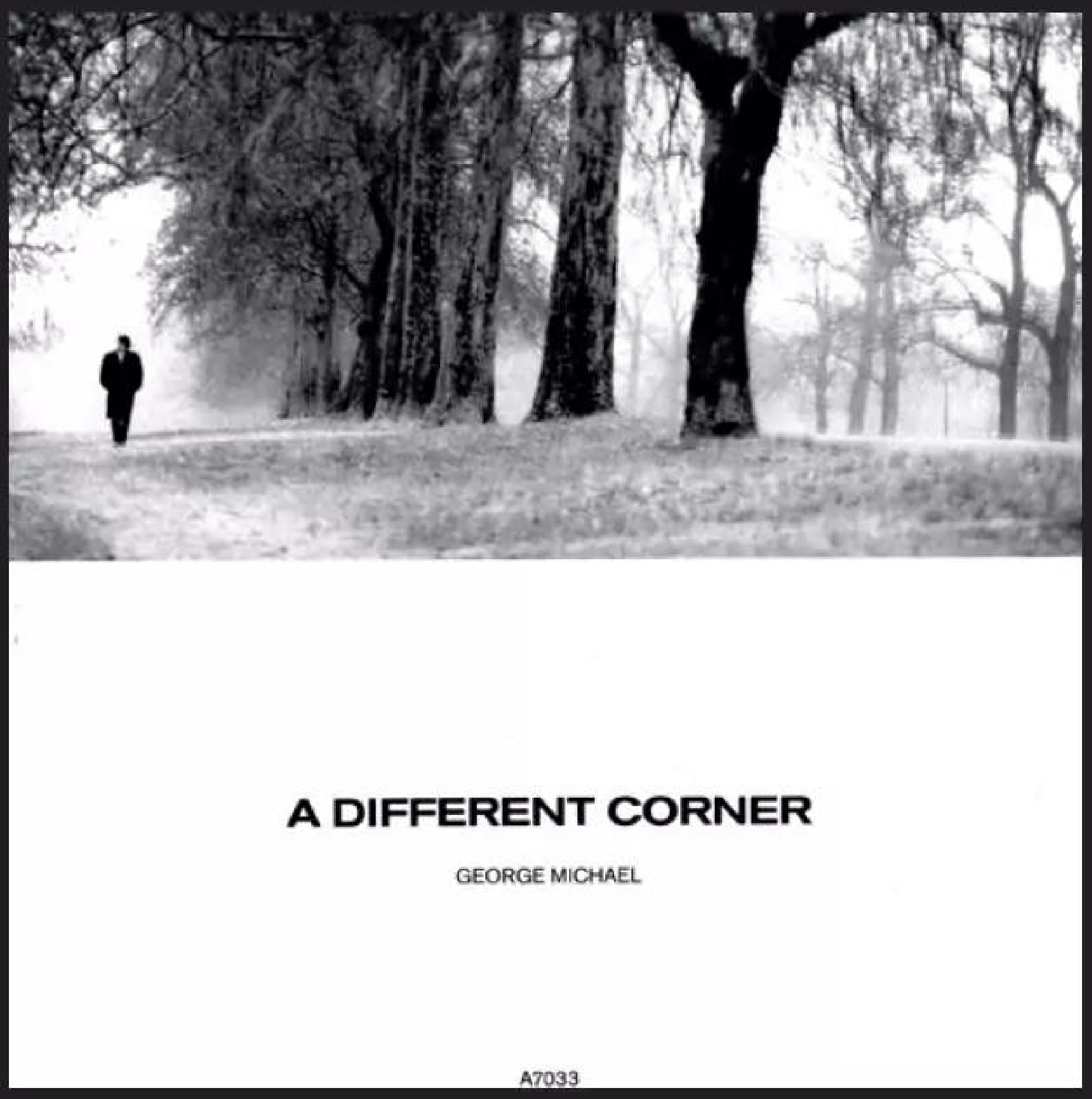


10

STRIPPED

DEPECHE MODE

Black Celebration's other two singles, *A Question Of Lust* and *A Question Of Time*, are fine fare, but our pick has to be its first electro-goth pacemaker, a murky, creeping journey into the negative effects of industry and technology on the human psyche, as Dave Gahan's baritone paints a dystopian scene: "Metropolis has nothing on this/ You're breathing in fumes, I taste when we kiss". *Stripped* illustrated a major shift, as the band dipped into darker climes. While *NME* found it "morose", *Smash Hits* rightly thought it "the best thing they've done in ages".



15

A DIFFERENT CORNER

GEORGE MICHAEL

From the tender strings that introduce it to the harmonised classical guitar that plays it out, George Michael's mournful ballad about "a very quick relationship" was a huge departure from Wham!, despite being written while the duo were enjoying worldwide fame. A Juno-60 synth provides the backbone here, as George shows off his immaculate vocal control, sinking and rising in a fashion far more intense than anything produced with Andrew Ridgeley. "*A Different Corner* was the most honest thing I've done so far," he told *Smash Hits* of his UK No.1. "It was very true to me. In fact it was so personal."

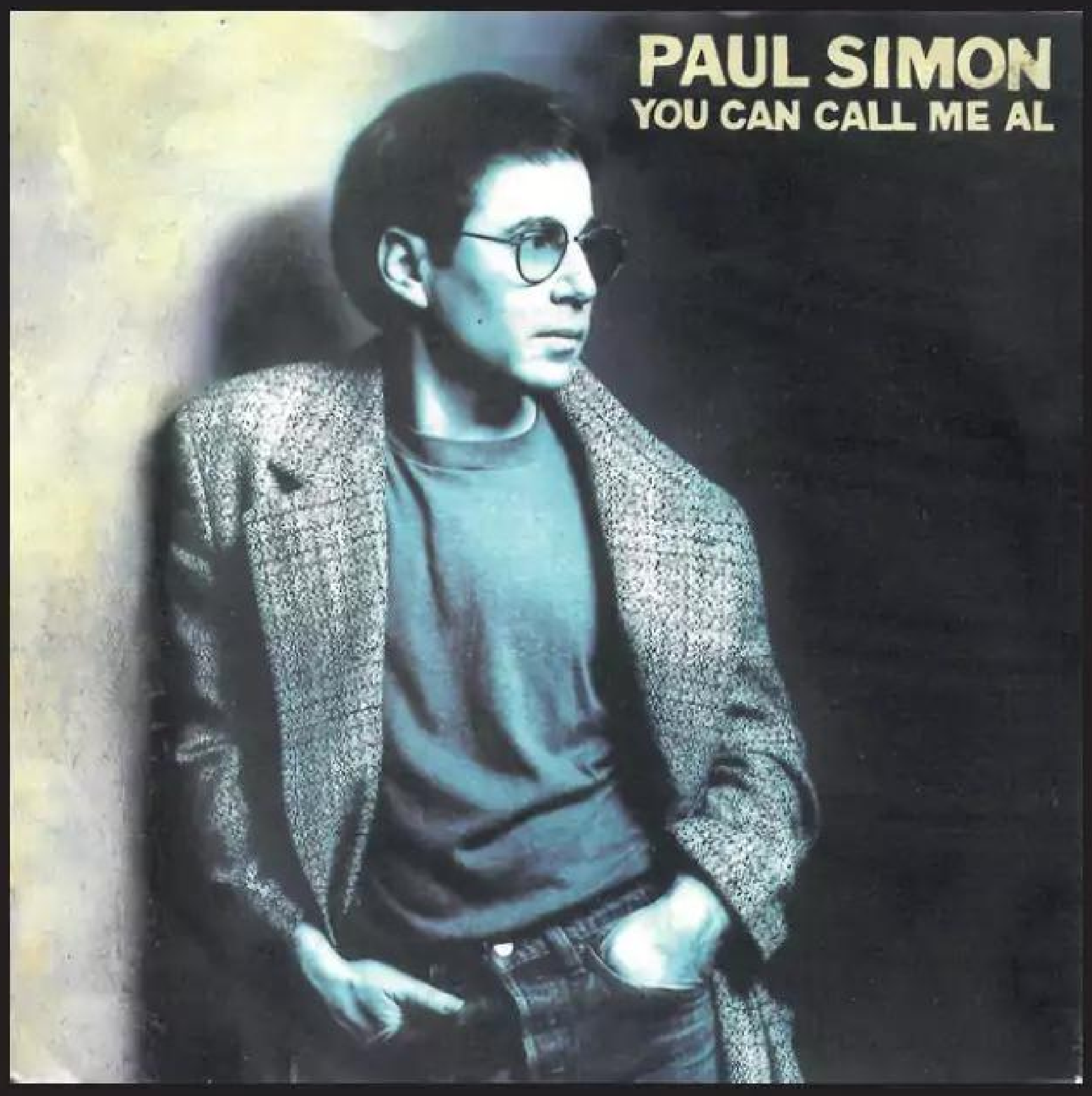
ANITA BAKER
SWEET LOVE

14

SWEET LOVE

ANITA BAKER

Sweet Love launched Anita Baker into the stratosphere to become a quiet storm classic. She'd learnt the ropes in church, taken by gospel great Mahalia Jackson and jazz vocalists such as Sarah Vaughan, and was soon to feature in greatest singers of all time lists herself. Discovered in a nightclub, she joined funk group Chapter 8, eventually making a mark on the charts with her solo debut LP *The Songstress* in 1983. Having scoured the songwriters of L.A., she recorded the *Rapture* album with Chapter 8's Michael J. Powell producing – *Sweet Love* deservedly bagged her the Best R&B Song Grammy.



13

YOU CAN CALL ME AL

PAUL SIMON

A much-cherished satellite from the soon-to-be-feted *Graceland* LP, *You Can Call Me Al* painted pictures of a troubled man amidst a mid-life crisis. Its nomenclature was inspired by composer Pierre Boulez, who, on leaving a party hosted by Simon said, "Sorry I have to leave, Al, and give my best to Betty." This clumsy faux pas led to an in-joke between Simon and his wife (Peggy). Simon's "spiritual" trip to South Africa provided the album's core, aided by a cast of South African musos, even if its huge blast-of-brass hook is in fact a guitar synth. Chevy Chase lip-syncing in the video was the cherry on top.

erasure
Sometimes

09

SOMETIMES

ERASURE

Vince Clarke and Andy Bell's debut LP *Wonderland* failed to hit the heights, but when a follow-up single was rush-released, their fortunes turned around. With a soon-to-become-huge Flood in the producer's chair, and with so much riding on *Sometimes*, Mute boss Daniel Miller must have thanked the stars when it climbed to UK No.2, the duo having gained exposure at Nelson Mandela's 70th birthday concert. *Sounds* believed it added "a touch of class to the airwaves", while *Metro* called it "irresistibly catchy and singable". It has since become a signature.

JANET JACKSON
WHAT HAVE YOU DONE FOR ME LATELY

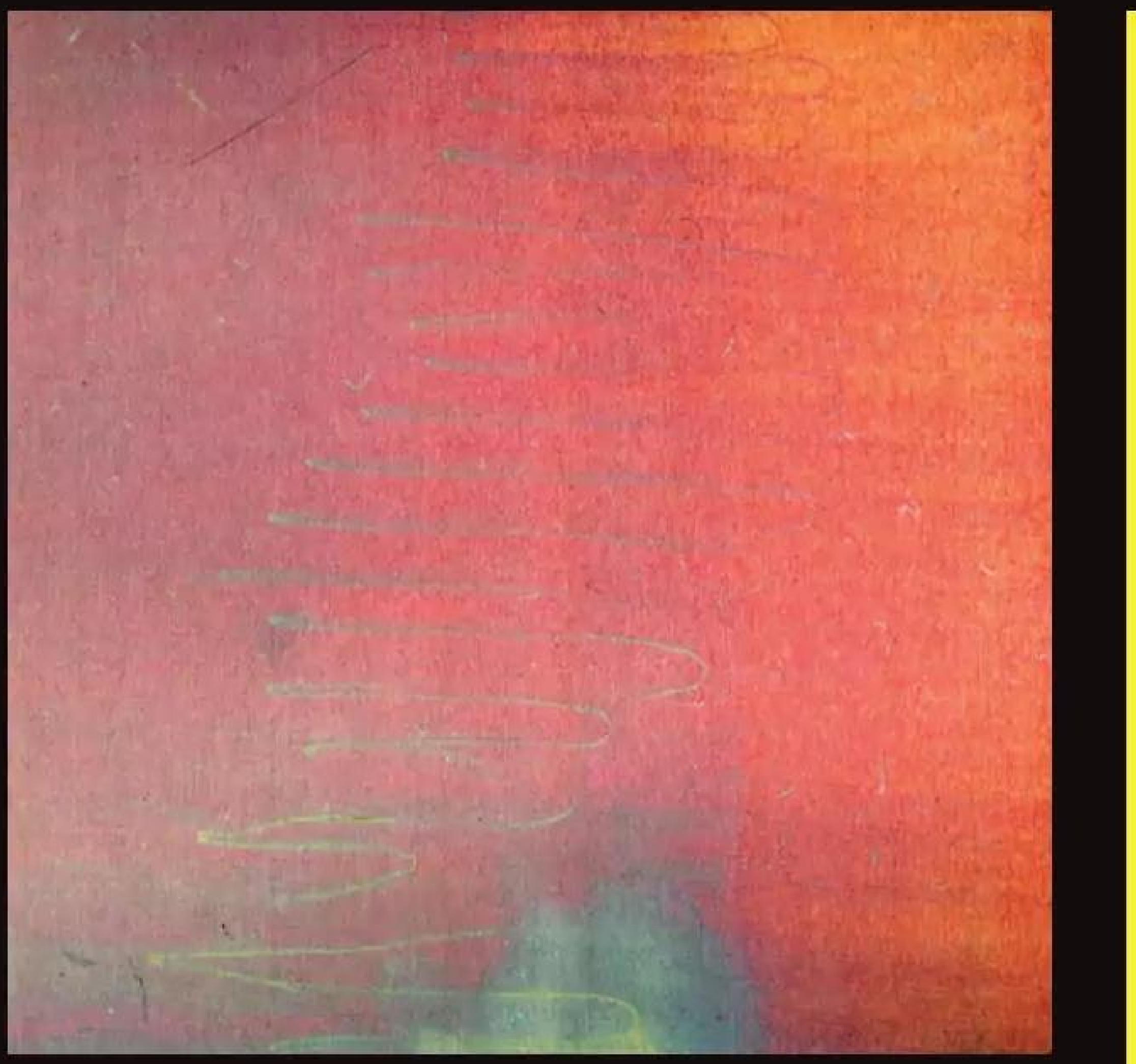
08

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE FOR ME LATELY

JANET JACKSON

With two mediocre attempts behind her, Janet Jackson's third album *Control* was independence writ large, a 20-year-old Janet having just left home, sacked her father as manager and left her husband. Another to be written with Minneapolis duo Jam & Lewis, who'd intended the track for their own use, *Control*'s uber-funky lead single was a last minute addition that landed her a UK and US Top 5 hit. *Control* would hold sway over a generation of female artists and begin a long-term collaboration with the Jam & Lewis.

> Janet Jackson's third album *Control* was independence writ large, a 20-year-old Janet having just left home, sacked her father as manager and left her husband



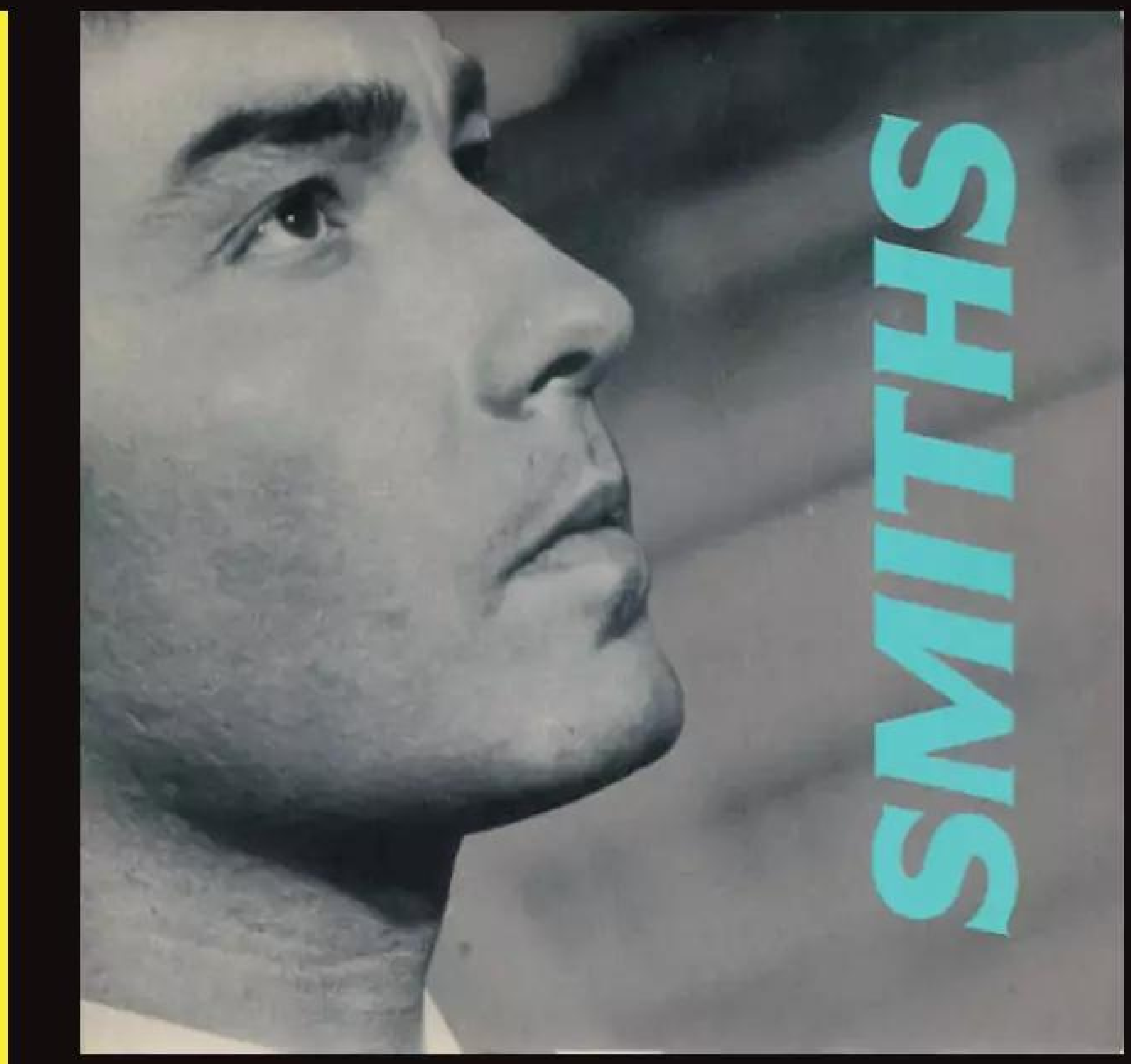
07

BIZARRE LOVE TRIANGLE

NEW ORDER

Evolving from a live song called 'Broken Promises' and with a title aped from the *News Of The World*, *Bizarre Love Triangle* profits as much from its machine-built precision as it does its very human story. The electronic thud of sequenced bass emerges from sampled stabs to begin Bernard Sumner's blurred projection of a lovestruck protagonist reflecting on a relationship stalled in limbo. Rising synth strings strike up one of the band's most finely crafted choruses, on this sole single from *Brotherhood*. Strangely it swerved the UK Top 40, but excited the New York clubland that had so inspired them, a Top 5 dance hit.

> *Bizarre Love Triangle* profits as much from its machine-built precision as it does its very human story. The electronic thud of sequenced bass emerges from sampled stabs to begin Bernard Sumner's blurred projection of a lovestruck protagonist reflecting on a relationship stalled in limbo.

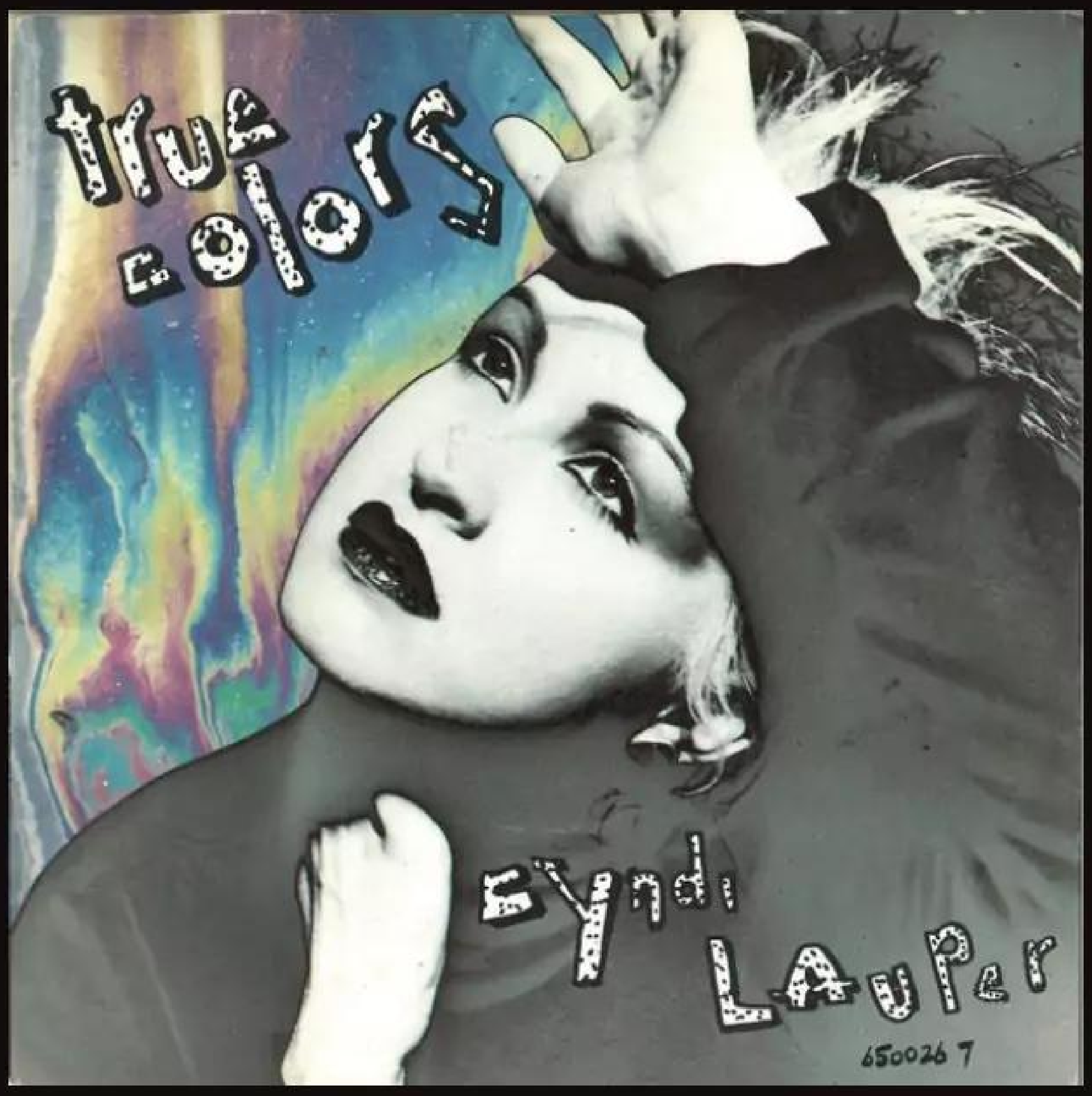


06

PANIC

THE SMITHS

A regular on many-a stereo as the centrepoint of the band's 1986 LP *The Queen Is Dead, There Is a Light That Never Goes Out* elevated Morrissey and Johnny Marr to godlike status for a generation of wannabe singers and guitarists respectively. And rhythm sections countrywide were just as dazzled by the chemistry exhibited by bassist Andy Rourke and drummer Mike Joyce. Why oh why it wasn't a single until the early 90s still baffles us. Nonetheless, the award here goes to the UK music scene-trashing standalone *Panic*, one of their finest creations. A UK No.11 and the *NME*'s single of the year.



05

TRUE COLORS

CYNDI LAUPER

Cyndi Lauper's yearning Billboard No.1, the opening statement from the album of the same name, was written by songwriters Billy Steinberg and Tom Kelly. When their piano demo – more of an overblown, gospel-styled affair – was passed over by country-pop singer Anne Murray, Lauper was quick to nab it for herself. "Cyndi Lauper came up with a very, very creative departure from our demo," commented Steinberg. "Cyndi completely dismantled that sort of traditional arrangement and came up with something that was breathtaking and stark."

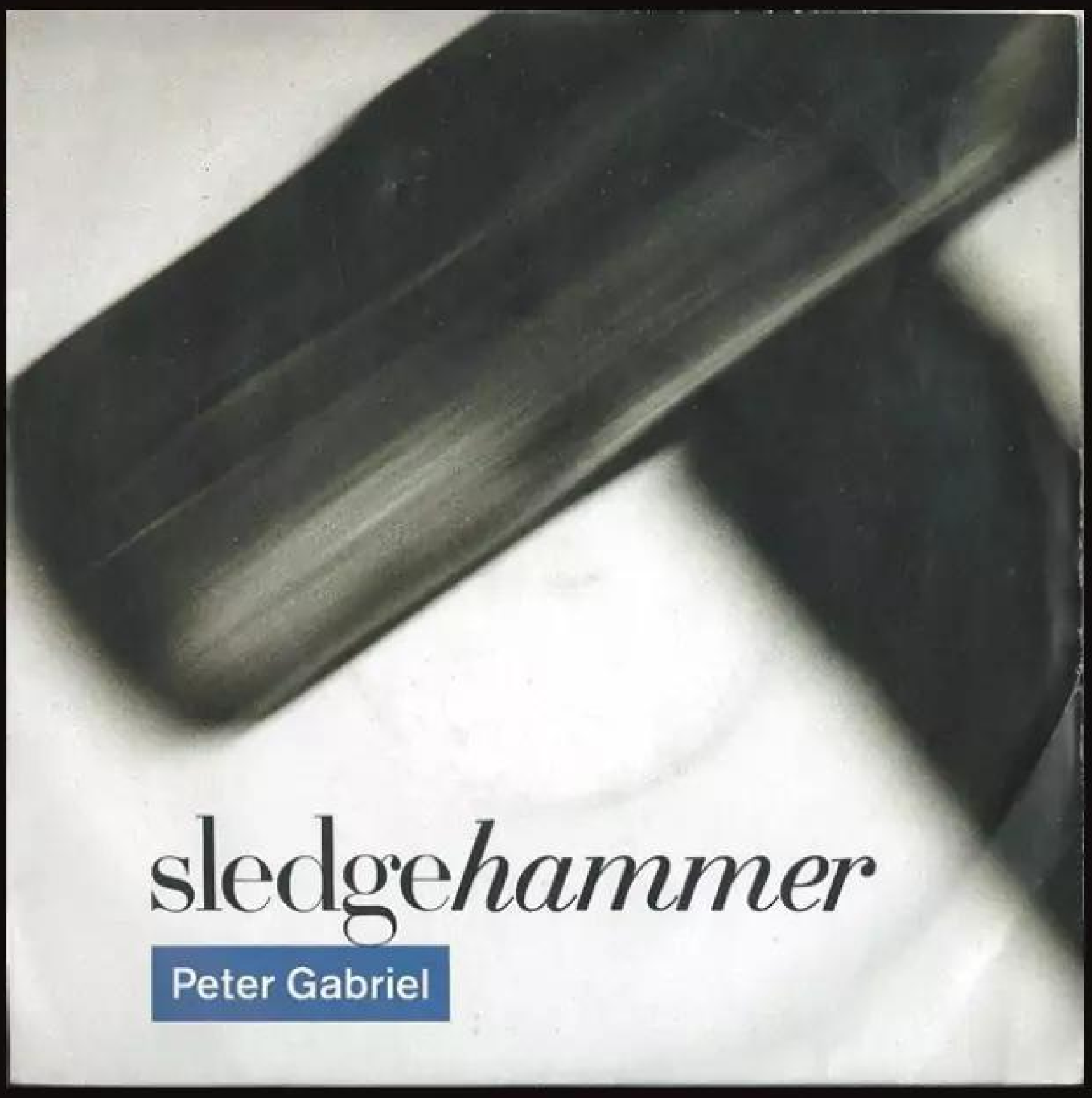
MADONNA
papa don't preach

04

PAPA DON'T PREACH

MADONNA

A bumper year for the newly coiffured Madonna, 1986 unleashed a run of pop diamonds from the *True Blue* album, but *Papa Don't Preach* outruns them all. This potent tale of a pregnant teen yearning for her father's blessing, yet defiant in her resolve to keep her child, is as formidable as anything she's done. This followed *Live To Tell* to No.1, but hit far harder, caring little for the backlash that would inevitably follow. With its heady mix of funk, disco and synth-pop, it was a fearless move, as much a show of strength as a progression of her sound.



03

SLEDGEHAMMER

PETER GABRIEL

For those yet to clock it, *Sledgehammer* is a song about sex, and quite a rude one at that. With its knockout groove, exotic shakuhachi flutes and with P.P. Arnold helping out on vocals, the big single from *So* was a powerhouse. An homage to the soul and blues sounds that he grew up with, Gabriel borrowed a brass section from his fave artist Otis Redding to do the business. Planting him firmly into the commercial arena, this dislodged his former band Genesis from US No.1, while its now infamous animated video would become the most-played video in MTV's history.

PRINCE AND THE REVOLUTION/KISS

02

KISS

PRINCE AND THE REVOLUTION

One of the Purple One's most well-known and best-loved creations, later bombastically ejected onto the dancefloors of the late-80s via Art Of Noise's collaboration with the mighty Tom Jones, *Kiss* oozes charm, style and naughtiness. Released in February by Prince's own Paisley Park label as the pace-setter for The Revolution's eighth studio LP *Parade*, *Kiss* was always destined to become a worldwide No.1, certified gold in its year of release. This spicy perennial was initially intended for Prince's funk protégés Mazarati, who'd worked up the track with producer David Z in the adjacent studio to Prince at Sunset Sound Studio in Hollywood. Realising his own brilliance, and the follies of his generosity, he quickly reclaimed the song for himself, keeping both David Z's addictive rhythm and Mazarati's streamlined backing vocals and juiced it up to the max. One Grammy later, we're sure glad he did.

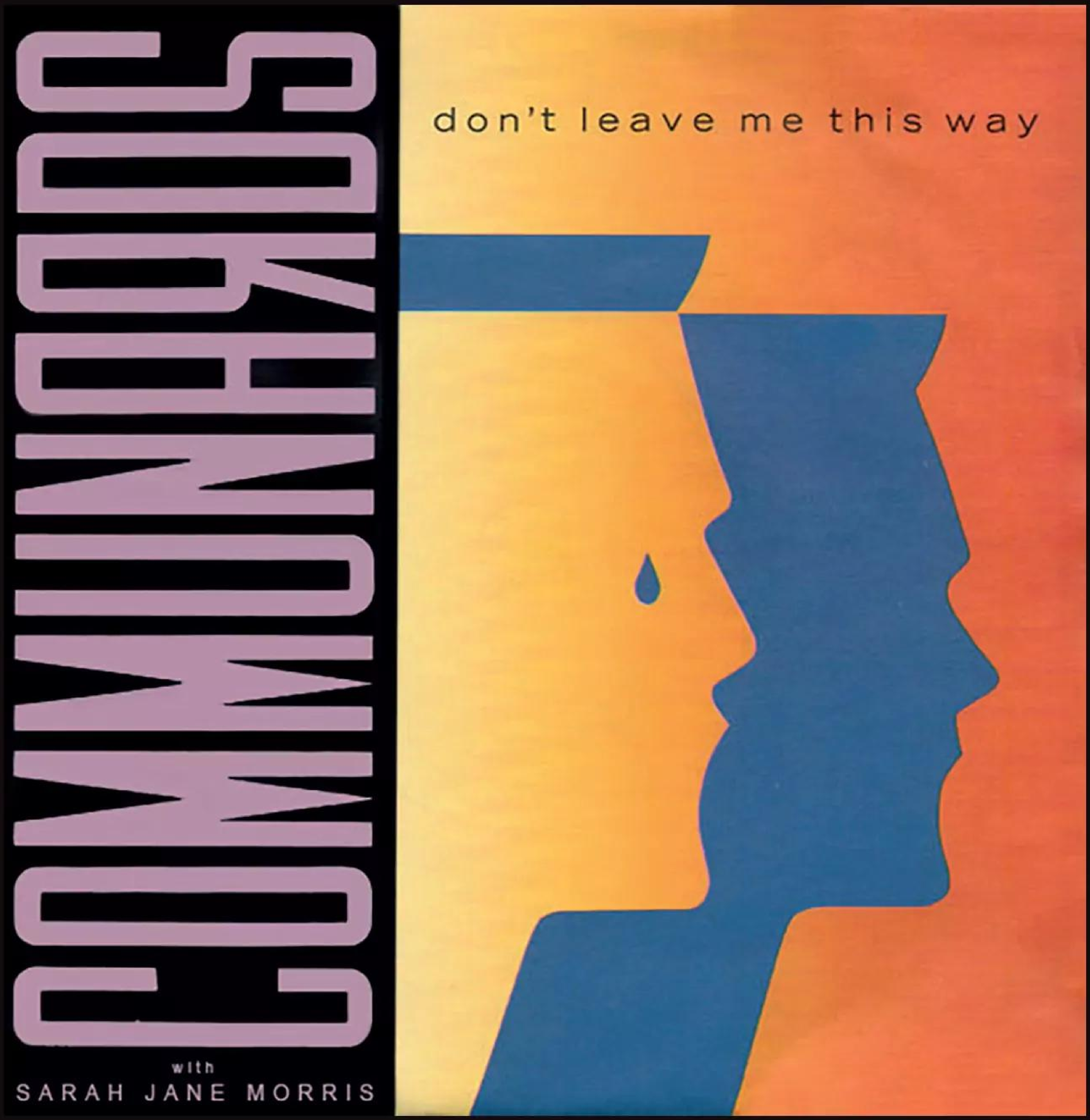
> In 1986, it was practically impossible to walk the streets of the UK without hearing Jimmy Somerville and Richard Coles' unstoppable hi-NRG chart-topper blaring out triumphantly from somewhere or other

01

DON'T LEAVE ME THIS WAY

THE COMMUNARDS

In 1986 it was practically impossible to walk the streets of the UK without hearing Jimmy Somerville and Richard Coles' unstoppable hi-NRG chart-topper blaring out triumphantly from somewhere or other. A transformation of the Gamble-Huff-Gilbert-penned original – a disco hit for Harold Melvin & the Blue Notes in 1975 – The Communards re-crafted it for 80s clubland with seemingly consummate ease. Summiting the UK hit parade in September '86 for a month, the track flew of the shelves to become the best-selling single of the entire year over here – a pretty impressive feat given the competition – while just sneaking its way into the Billboard Top 40. For some unknown reason, *Smash Hits*' Simon Mills was utterly scathing in his review at the time, criticising the song's "stupid, blundering unsympathetic hi-NRG synthesiser noises" and, perhaps a little too cruelly, Somerville's "bloody ridiculous voice", sneering, "I don't like this record and I don't like The Communards." He even signed off with a pop at the artwork. Now considered one of the decade's finest and achieving gay anthem status, we imagine he ate his words soon after, gave in, and cut a rug to it on the nearest dancefloor just like the rest of us. ■



CYNDI LAUPER
TRUE COLORS

CLASSIC ALBUM

TRUE COLORS
CYNDI LAUPER

AFTER HEADLINE SUCCESS WITH HER FIRST EFFORT AND PITTED AGAINST A CERTAIN ALL-CONQUERING FELLOW AMERICAN SUPERSTAR, ALL EYES WERE ON CYNDI LAUPER FOR HER LONG-AWAITED FOLLOW-UP

IAN WADE

Cyndi Lauper had become the toast of pop with an award-winning debut album, star roles in the biggest charity record of the decade and even managing a wrestler – surely all that a newly minted superstar could ask for. But then there was a small case of what would be the next move…

The difficult second album can be even more daunting when you've been the toast of the music industry, only to find you've been increasingly overtaken by your supposed arch rival. But in all honesty, Cyndi wasn't planning on repeating herself and continuing to be the kooky kaleidoscopic-haired popstrel of *Girls Just Want To Have Fun* renown. The album *She's So Unusual* had been none-more 1983 with its ready-made-for-MTV hits, but that wasn't going to a long-term plan, and as her co-popstar Madonna had proven, you had to be able to adapt to survive. Talking to *Billboard* on the occasion of *True Colors'* 35th anniversary, Lauper admitted: "It was stressful, because I wanted it to be okay. You know, I didn't want the sophomore jinx thing. But it turned out to be an extraordinary experience."

It was also part of a survival tactic, as Lauper's original label Portrait was about to be absorbed into parent company Epic – and the people who'd surrounded her during the *She's So Unusual* era. "That was a big kind of hole in my whole life," she explained to *Billboard*. "You have all of these people who groom you, and you work with them, and they teach you, but these companies, they looked at those kinds of people, the executives, as disposable. For me, as an artist, it was a heartbreak… because then you have to deal with someone else who really has their own agenda."

© Getty

THE SONGS ▶▶

① CHANGE OF HEART

Written by singer songwriter Essra Mohawk, with additional lyrics by Lauper. Essra's original had appeared on her 1985 album *E-Turn* that saw her abandoning her hippy-er style in favour of edgy eightiesness. Cyndi rescued it and The Bangles, who'd supported Cyndi on tour, provided backing vocals.

② MAYBE HE'LL KNOW

A cover – with Cyndi amendments – of a Blue Angel number which opened their solitary self-titled album from 1980. Cyndi had originally written with keyboardist John Turi anyway, so she could do what she liked. Billy Joel dropped in to add doo-wop-style backing vocals seeing as it sounded like something from his blockbusting *An Innocent Man* album.

③ BOY BLUE

One of two songs that Cyndi dedicated to her friend Gregory Natal who died of AIDS. He'd encouraged her to write a song like the Burt Bacharach-penned Gladys Knight, Dionne Warwick, Elton John and Stevie Wonder charity sing-up *That's What Friends Are For.* Speaking to *Interview* magazine in 2019, Cyndi said, "I poured my heart and my liver out. Which doesn't make for good repetitive play. But in the interim, Gregory had passed, and then this song *True Colors* was brought to me…"

④ TRUE COLORS

The title track was written by Billy Steinberg – dedicated to his mum – and the initial arrangement was said to be not unlike that of *Bridge Over Troubled Water.* It was originally offered to country songstress Anne Murray who passed on it, and then Cyndi heard it and rearranged it to make it her own. Her second US chart-topper, the song went on to inspire her co-founding the True Colors Fund, a non-profit focusing on LGBTQ+ homelessness.

⑤ CALM INSIDE THE STORM

Co-written by Rick Derringer, an Andy Warhol associate who'd hit success as a member of The McCoys (*Hang On Sloopy* made Billboard No.26), played guitar on albums by Bette Midler and Steely Dan, and worked with Jim Steinman projects such as Bonnie Tyler and Meat Loaf. He also produced the WWF's *The Wrestling Album*, released in 1985, which Cyndi contributed backing vocals to.

⑥ WHAT'S GOING ON

It takes a brave artist to cover Marvin Gaye's defining 1971 classic *What's Going On*, but Lauper had long proven she was fearless on all fronts. Released as the third single from the album, in a quite weird and improbable turn of events, the track had better success on the dance charts after Shep Pettibone remixed it.

⑦ IKO IKO

Possibly unaware that both Natasha and The Belle Stars had already had hits with it, and that The Belle Stars' version would go on to be their biggest hit Stateside when featured in *Rain Man*, Cyndi had a go at the standard first known as *Jock-A-Mo*, written and released in 1953 as a single by James "Sugar Boy" Crawford And His Cane Cutters but better known as *Iko Iko* when The Dixie Cups issued it in 1965.

⑧ THE FARAWAY NEARBY

Having covered The Brains' *Money Changes Everything* on first album *She's So Unusual*, Cyndi reconnected with songwriter and Brains vocalist Tom Gray to write this and another song entitled *A Part Hate* – originally mooted for *True Colors* but nixed by the label because its subject matter of apartheid tipped the politics quota of the album too much. "She said she wanted a rootsy song with a little bit of a Cajun feel," Gray told *The New York Times.* "She had a strong sense of what she wanted. A lot of times she can hear things in her head but she doesn't know how to play them, and I think that's why she likes to work with other musicians." Gray would graduate from New Wave and pivot to bluegrass during his career, before his death in 2001.

⑨ 911

This confusing number about emergency services being deployed to an ailing relationship was co-written with Steve Broughton Lunt. Lunt had worked with Cyndi on *The Goonies* and arrangements for *Boy Blue*, but originally hailed from one-hit-wonders City Boy, whose *5.7.0.5.* managed to achieve what none of their other singles did and reach the Top 10 in 1978. Lunt fared slightly better as President of A&R at Jive records where he looked after Britney Spears, Backstreet Boys and *NSync. The operator voice at the end belonged to Pee-wee Herman née Paul Reubens.

⑩ ONE TRACK MIND

The clattering percussion-heavy album closer was co-written by Jimmy Bralower – who is credited on pretty much every track on *True Colors* as a programmer and Linn Drum specialist and is quietly one of the most influential musicians of the decade – with Jeff Bova, a one-time avant garde funk session keyboardist and bassist, whose pop CV has Celine Dion, Sisters Of Mercy, Yoko Ono, Jody Watley and Iron Maiden on it. Fancy that!

So faced with uncertainty but aware what she didn't want to do – and after realising she didn't want to work with Rick Chertoff, who'd helped helm her debut after their relationship became awkward – Lauper started again and hooked up with Lennie Petze, who'd executively produced the debut, and placed manager/boyfriend David Wolff as executive.

By 1986, of course, Lauper had reached new level of fame. "Every so often it registers," she told *The New York Times*, "I'm always flying out the door when people stop me for an autograph, and I think, 'Oh yeah, I was Cyndi Lauper when I went out this morning, and I still am – this confirms it.'". As such, the singer was able to call on a few names to help with the album, with backing vocals from pop royalty Billy Joel (on *Maybe He'll Know*), upcoming stars and Lauper support turns The Bangles (*Change Of Heart*), songwriting legends Ellie Greenwich (*Calm Inside The Storm*) and Aimee Mann (*The Faraway Nearby*), plus a cameo from Pee-Wee Herman (*911*). She also had musical back-up from veterans such as Nile Rodgers, who had no qualms working with Madonna's nemesis having worked magic on *Like A Virgin*, and Adrian Belew, who'd done time with Frank Zappa, Bowie, Talking Heads and Laurie Anderson, making it a far more assured vehicle. To top it all off, the Jean Cocteau's *Orpheus* nod of the cover sleeve was a photo taken by Annie Leibovitz.

Oh yes, this was a next level priority, and Lauper had the eyes of the entire industry on her, wondering if she would be able to repeat her success having been out of the public eye for an unthinkably long 18 months. But it's not like during that time she'd just been twiddling her thumbs. Since *She's So Unusual*, she'd project-managed the soundtrack for *The Goonies* (even if that sent her into hospital), managed the female world wrestling champion Wendy Richter, and taken a lead on USA For Africa's *We Are The World*. However, that break was needed, even if from November 1985 to May 1986 she was toiling away on *True Colors.* "I know it looks like, 'Oh, what has she done in the last two years'," she said to *The New York Times.*

THE VIDEOS

TRUE COLORS
Lots of symbolism going on here, with children building sandcastles and a couple of women who take tea in a boat on the sand. Cyndi, meanwhile, wanders about in a series of outfits, including something that looks very much like a chandelier on her head and a sort-of skirt effort made of newspaper. Add to all that, she has a snog-up with her boyfriend Dave Wolff, caresses some shells and replicates the album artwork that nods to Jean Cocteau's *Orpheus*. Directed by choreographer and director Patricia Birch whose CV included *Grease 2, West Side Story* and Sister Sledge's *Frankie* video.

CHANGE OF HEART
Cyndi Lauper does London, featuring footage of Big Ben, red buses and the River Thames, while she romps around lip-synching the track with her band, who handle none-more-80s instruments in a variety of iconic locations including Covent Garden, Leicester Square and Trafalgar Square. It's as if she asked director Andy Morahan to do what he did with Pet Shop Boys' *West End Girls* but slightly worse. None of the assembled crowd seem to be particularly bothered that they have a superstar in their midst, even if they had to hear *Change Of Heart* half a dozen times.

WHAT'S GOING ON
Another one helmed by Andy Morahan, who was perhaps better known as the director behind pretty much all of Wham! and George Michael's video promos – from 1984's *Wake Me Up Before You Go Go* to 2004's *Round Here* – as well as a fair few for The Human League and Bananarama, plus chart-toppers such as Bros (*When Will I Be Famous*) and S Club (*Don't Stop Movin'*). The reasonably basic performance clip of Lauper's version of the Marvin Gaye anthem was nominated for Best Cinematography at the 1987 MTV Video Music Awards but, somewhat shockingly, lost out to Peter Gabriel's ground-breaking *Sledgehammer.*

> "IT'S WORTH EVERY ONCE IN A WHILE, IN A LARGE SEA OF POP RECORDS… TO THROW IN SOMETHING THAT WILL PENETRATE THE SURFACE"
>
> CYNDI LAUPER

"But I was working. There was pressure to get it done, but I wouldn't settle for just anything, and in the end, a deadline doesn't count unless you're satisfied. In this field, you're only as good as your last record, but I still want to be an artist – somebody who, 20 years later, will show a thread of consciousness through all the different works."

Even when it looked like there was still some form of mirroring with Madonna – whose similarly titled *True Blue* came out a couple of months ahead of *True Colors* – Lauper and her team were too locked into their vision to change for the sake of it. There was room for the pair of them.

Much like *She's So Unusual*, *True Colors* had a smattering of covers, with Lauper gamely tackling Marvin Gaye's *What's Going On* and – seemingly unaware that anyone was particularly wanting any further versions of it after Natasha and The Belle Stars – the New Orleans' Mardi Gras number, and vaguely culturally appropriating, *Iko Iko*. There was also *Maybe He'll Know* that was a slight rewrite of a song by Lauper's previous band Blue Angel.

True Colors did well and, while not *She's So Unusual* levels of well, it still sold seven million copies worldwide and two million of those were in America. The title track topped the Billboard list, *Change Of Heart* hit No.3 and *What's Going On* managed No.12. Meanwhile over in the UK, the album didn't exactly capitalise on the success of *She's So Unusual* and reached No.25 in October during a nine-week run. And while the title track has endured and become a classic, initially it was the only significant chart hit in the UK making No.12. The next two singles, *Change Of Heart* and *What's Going On* made No.67 and No.57 repsectively.

But ultimately it was the title track that would steer the album towards those sales, even if it felt like beginning the second album era with a ballad was a bit risky. "It was a gamble and I was nervous, but we felt it was worth taking the risk because it was such a great song," Lauper informed *Smash Hits*' Ian Cranna. "And it was a very real performance – very intimate. It's worth every once in a while, in a large sea of pop records and commerciality to throw in something that will penetrate the surface. I didn't write this song… But it was a great, great song that needed to be sung."

True Colors would prove to have legs and long outlive the rest of the album, with the gay community adopting the song, as well as Lauper herself being more vocal about why she was inspired to perform it, talking more openly about her friend Gregory Natal dying of AIDS. She founded the True Colors Foundation in 2008, an initiative to raise funds and to help end homelessness among young LGBTQ+ people, along with a package tour that ran for a few years and would feature acts such as The B-52's, Erasure, Debbie Harry and The Gossip. Lauper's allyship has seen the song become a gay anthem and she's been vocal and proactive ever since.

The critical reception to *True Colors* was mixed, with *Rolling Stone* commenting, "Her uneasiness gave her early work much of its spark; what places *True Colors* a notch below her debut is that Cyndi Lauper just isn't that unusual anymore." Elsewhere, *Smash Hits*' critic indicated the divisive nature of the album: "I shall say a merry 'big deal' to those who point out that these songs aren't quite as appealingly poppy as before; cock a snook at the boring old purists who stand aghast at her brave "medley" of Marvin Gaye's *What's Going On* and the *Iko Iko* nursery rhyme; shrug a nonchalant "so what?" at the fact that the rhythms are a bit more heavy handed than is strictly desirable". *Record Mirror*, however, weren't so keen, saying, "This album is merely a tired pastiche of the eccentric material she's flogged half to death before". Oh dear.

Cyndi had showcased her abilities as a pop star and how visually arresting she was for the video age, but album two was about her as an artist, explaining to *The New York Times*: "On the first record, I didn't show off my voice that much… Mostly I worked in straight long pitches, more staccato, as opposed to more of a lyrical thing on this album."

"The second album says, 'Have the courage of your convictions and love yourself a little'," Lauper said. ''I want the songs to say, 'Love yourself,' because we really are taught not to."

Cyndi Lauper may never hit the commercial heights of her debut again, but then there are huge swathes of acts who never manage to repeat that alchemy, but with *True Colors* 'only' shifting seven million, she still further embedded herself into the culture, moved away from the shadow of Madonna comparisons and showed she wasn't a one-off. ■

Shining through: Lauper onstage in Hawaii in 1986

© Getty

1986 was a big year for Prince, with the release of his *Parade* LP and its accompanying movie, *Under The Cherry Moon*

© Getty

I WANT TO BE YOUR FANTASY

WRONG-FOOTING CRITICS ONCE MORE, PRINCE FOLLOWED THE MUTED AND MIXED RESPONSE TO *AROUND THE WORLD IN A DAY* WITH THE EUROPHILE FLAVOURS OF HIS EIGHTH ALBUM, ALSO A SOUNDTRACK TO *UNDER THE CHERRY MOON*, HIS FIRST MOVIE AS A DIRECTOR

WYNDHAM WALLACE

On a poignant Easter Sunday, 7 April 1985, in front of 55,000 fans at Miami's Orange Bowl, Prince And The Revolution wound up their *Purple Rain* tour with a 22-song set including every track from that globe-conquering soundtrack. Only a week earlier he'd announced his retirement from live performance with a press release quoting his manager. "I asked Prince what he planned to do," Steve Fargnoli wrote. "He told me, 'I'm going to look for the ladder.' So I asked him what that meant. All he said was, 'Sometimes it snows in April.'"

If this was cryptic, it was partially explained just two weeks later when Prince released his new album, *Around The World In A Day*, containing a song called *The Ladder*. If, however, this marked the start of his 'psychedelic' phase, he had already moved on to something else. One day earlier, he'd entered Hollywood's Sunset Sound Studio where, accompanied only by Lisa Coleman on piano and Wendy Melvoin on guitar, he'd laid down what would become the startlingly brittle conclusion to his next LP, 1986's *Parade*.

"He had this song idea," Melvoin told Duane Tudahl in 2017 for *Prince And The Parade And Sign O' The Times Era Studio Sessions: 1985 And 1986*, "but he looked at me and Lisa and was like, 'Whatcha got? What can you do on it? Let's do something. Just the three of us.' And so, we came up with the riff and started playing it. It came very fast."

When, a year later, the result emerged, its title explained the other half of Prince's and Fargnoli's enigmatic pronouncement. Written as early as 1977, this was *Sometimes It Snows In April*, and it was immediately clear they'd created something enduring. "I remember hitting notes," Coleman informed Tudahl, "and he turned around and gave me the money sign. That always meant he liked it. And it's just so bizarre to me what that song means to us now. It was April 21 when we wrote it."

The date's significant because he'd die 41 years later to the day, while the song has since gone on to be embraced not only as one of *Parade*'s crowning achievements but also Prince's. Moreover, though Coleman added that she wished they'd pursued its style further, it's become, at least to fans, an immaculate epitaph. In as good an illustration as any, it was performed a week after he passed by the (now also late) D'Angelo for his tribute on *The Late Show Starring Jimmy Fallon*.

"Sometimes I wish that life was never-ending," Prince had sung that spring day in 1985, predicting the thoughts of millions decades later, before adding sorrowfully, "And all good things, they say, never last." Then, as a final gut punch to round off the record, he'd sighed, "And love, it isn't love until it's passed." The same sentiment could be applied to *Parade*. Among those who turned to the song in 2016 were doubtless some who played the full album, happy to be reminded just how much love it truly deserves.

Under The Cherry Moon would be the feature debut for British actor Kristin Scott Thomas

© Alamy

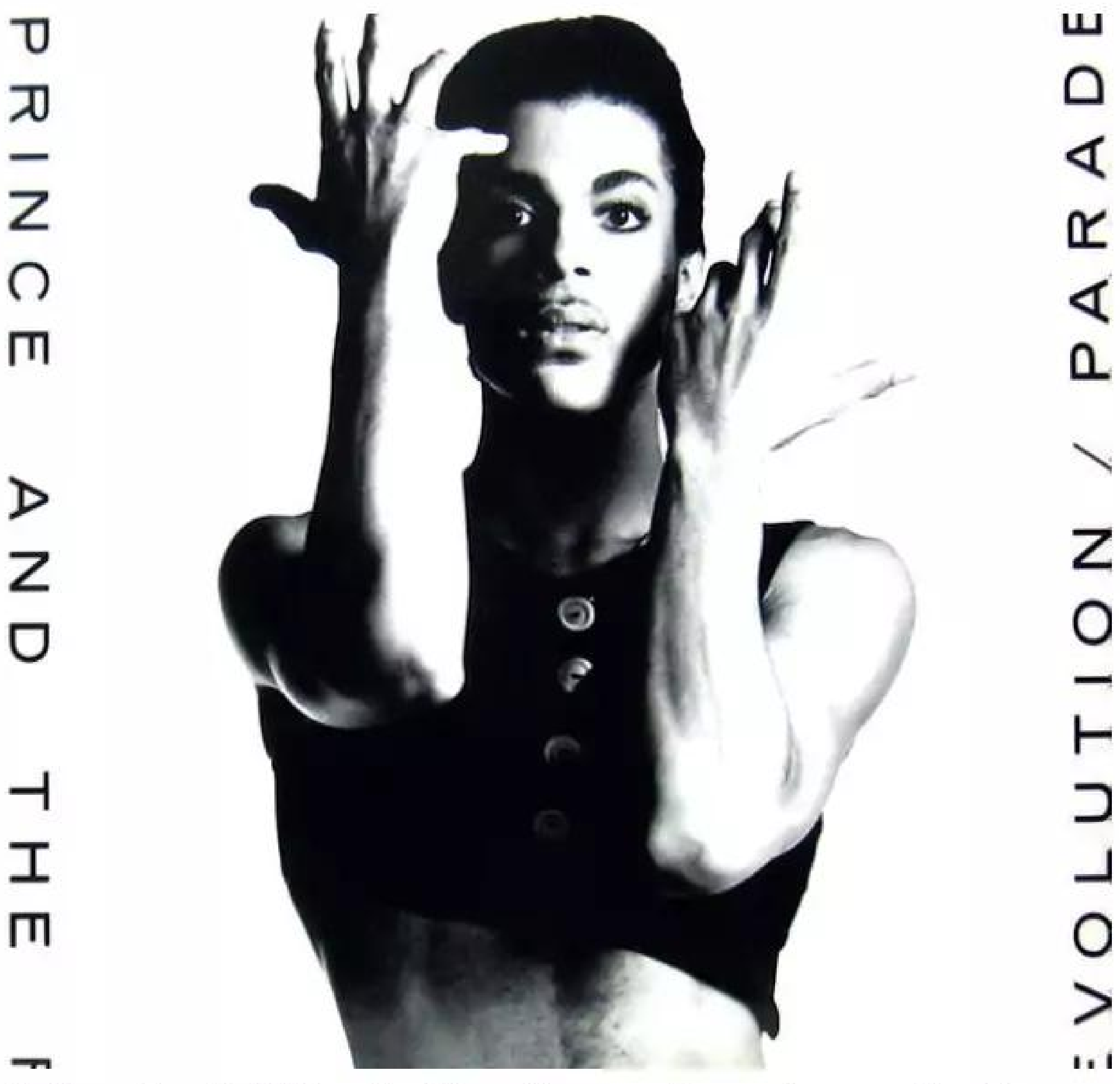
Because the truth is, it didn't please everyone, and it didn't help that it came weighed down with substantial associations that swiftly proved a burden. Subtitled *Music From The Motion Picture Under The Cherry Moon* – the underlining was Prince's own, as if to signal its importance – *Parade* was also a soundtrack to his second film, his first as a director and markedly different to *Purple Rain*. That said, he only took up the role in mid-September, a week or two into filming.

According to *Smash Hits*, original director Mary Lambert – who'd arrived hot on the heels of several Madonna videos – had called the script "a fairy tale about a couple of boys who go the Riviera to strike it rich. It's hopelessly romantic." And yet it proved anything but. Though Lambert would soon diplomatically describe the circumstances as "amicable," after Terence Stamp had quit his role as a billionaire financier, Prince had quickly fired her. With Stephen Berkoff stepping in, Prince decided to work not only in front but also *behind* the camera.

The premise, at least, sounded promising. The script had been written by Becky Johnston, who'd helped pioneer late-70s No Wave Cinema. The cinematographer for the film was Michael Ballhaus, a close associate of the renowned Rainer Werner Fassbinder. Prince, meanwhile, played Christopher Tracy, a nightclub pianist and conman (named after both Chris Moon, the man who'd discovered him, as well as Moon's girlfriend), with Jerome Benton, formerly of The Time, as his sidekick, Tricky. Francesca Annis, last seen in *Dune*, was Tracy's part-time lover, and his inevitable additional romantic interest gave Kristin Scott Thomas her first film role.

While there was no denying it looked ravishing in nostalgic black and white – *Blitz* called it "grandiloquent and highly successful" – most critics tore it apart. *The Sunday Telegraph* concluded that Prince was "out of his depth as an actor, though too arrogant, one suspects, to understand why." Indeed, it became as good as a ritual to pan the production, with his self-appointed role as 'auteur' deemed too lofty by the press. Submitted for eight categories at the Golden Raspberries, the film 'won' five awards, including Worst Picture, and even that it shared with *Howard The Duck*. As Prince admitted to *Rolling Stone*, "I learned that I can't direct what I didn't write."

Even before its release, Prince had other problems with which to contend, because,


PRINCE AND THE REVOLUTION / PARADE

Prince's eighth studio album, *Parade* reached the Top 5 in both the UK and in his homeland

in truth, despite *Purple Rain*'s success, 1985 was an *annus horribilis*. In January, he'd failed to turn up for the recording of *We Are The World* – not a good look – and, after being sacked for an altercation with a photographer, an ex-bodyguard had sold an uncomplimentary story to the *National Enquirer*. Worse still, *Purple Rain*'s *Darling Nikki* had inspired Tipper Gore to found the notorious Parents Music Resource Center, and his management had invited gossip page ridicule by threatening a pasta manufacturer for making light of the name that they shared.

So it was beneath this increasingly unflattering shadow that, on 16 April, less than ten days after completing his six-month tour, he started what became *Parade*. Twenty four hours earlier he'd been mixing a 1981 recording of *Feel U Up* – a subsequent version would make 1989's *Batman* soundtrack – and now he began with a jam known as *Lemon Cake* before moving on to the frantic *Life Can Be So Nice*.

As the small hours beckoned, he settled behind the drumkit, and it took just one take to nail four tracks: *Wendy's Parade*, later retitled *Christopher Tracy's Parade* and co-credited to his father; *New Position*, soon re-recorded as *Soul Sister* by Wendy and Lisa, but never released; *I Wonder U*, whose vocal he'd hand over to Wendy; and, performed on stage already in a nascent variant, the film's title tune, which he'd recycle in three months as *The Question Of You*, found on 1990's *Graffiti Bridge*.

It was 28 April when its lead single, *Kiss*, was laid down as a bluesy acoustic number, then handed to his protégés, Mazarati, who were in the next-door studio. The next morning, having heard how they'd revised it, he reclaimed it, deleting the bass, adding guitars, and recording his own vocal parts. A day later, the track was worked on further, and by 1 May Prince had assembled the album's initial track listing.

Still, in early July Prince headed to Washington Avenue Warehouse, a rehearsal space in Eden Prairie, Minnesota, to record *Girls & Boys*, *Venus De Milo* and *Do U Lie?*. By the end of November, having wrapped *Cherry Moon*, he was back again, polishing *Mountains*, its music written by Coleman and Melvoin, and in mid-December he returned to Hollywood to tackle *Anotherloverholenyohead*.

Crucially, Prince then commissioned Clare Fischer – an idol of Herbie Hancock whose work for Rufus Prince had

SUBTITLED MUSIC FROM THE MOTION PICTURE UNDER THE CHERRY MOON, PARADE WAS ALSO A SOUNDTRACK TO HIS SECOND FILM, HIS FIRST AS A DIRECTOR

REACH OUT FOR SOMETHING NEW

As was his wont, Prince's time in the studio in 1985 wasn't exclusively devoted to *Parade*. He was working on Revolution drummer Sheila E.'s second album, *Romance 1600*, as well as beginning Jill Jones' eponymous LP, released in 1987. He was also preparing a self-titled debut for his side project, The Family, who celebrated by splitting after its August release and a single show.

In addition, he provided the *We Are The World* compilation with *4 The Tears In Your Eyes*, for which he also recorded a performance video for broadcast during Live Aid. Though otherwise unavailable until 2017, it wasn't the era's only song to take years to reach the public, if it reached them at all. *Evolsidog*, *Others Here With Us* and *Tibet* all remain unreleased, while *Old Friends 4 Sale* – partially inspired by the bodyguard who'd betrayed his trust by speaking to the media – only came out on 1999's *The Vault... Old Friends 4 Sale*, having been reworked in 1991. Then there was *All My Dreams*, which he first taped the day he began *Kiss* and which finally turned up on 2020's *Sign O' The Times* Super Deluxe edition. No wonder he wished that life was never-ending.

Prince shares the microphone with Wendy Melvoin during the Parade tour in Detroit, June '86

© Getty

KISS' PROMISE TO 'SHOW YOU WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT' HAD BEEN FULFILLED. IN JUNE '86, THE MAN WHO QUIT PERFORMING A YEAR AGO, HIT THE ROAD ONCE AGAIN

particularly admired – to provide orchestral arrangements in keeping with the film's French location. Though ultimately these only survived on six tracks, they were distinguished by a notably European twist which helped dramatically enlarge his audience on the continent, where for the first time he sold more than in America.

Public Enemy's Chuck D would later acknowledge the record "turned off a lot of the black followers", but some critics were naturally supportive. *The Sunday Times* called it "stunning" and *Spin* considered it "proof positive that Prince is the single most sagacious figure in all of modern R&B, funk and soul, the worthy successor to the mantle tailored by James Brown, Chuck Berry, Sly Stone, and Stevie Wonder."

Others were less flattering, with some impatient for another *Purple Rain* and unforgiving of his restless nature. "His eighth LP isn't just a *Parade*," *Creem* argued, "it's a freakshow," while the *Los Angeles Times* was less magnanimous still. "*Parade* isn't exactly a lazy album," it argued. "Prince offers some new sonic slants, and one track is strikingly touching. But his return to the gimmicky psychedelia and the presence of several throwaway cuts keep it far below the level of his best records."

NME went in hardest, with a lead review headlined 'Sometimes It Pisses Down In April' comparing it to *All Around The World…* "For all its neo-psychedelic silliness," wrote Barney Hoskyns, "it had three great songs, which is about three more than *Parade*." Indeed, his review's pithy sign-off seemed personal. "I find this record laboured and trite and self-satisfied and won't be listening to it again."

History has been kinder to its remarkable blend of multiple styles, from funk to chanson, as were *NME* before too long. With the year ending, they voted *Parade* 1986's Best Album – it had now gone platinum both sides of the Atlantic – while *Kiss*, which had given spectacular notice of the record back in February, was their Single of the Year. This also won him the year's Grammy for Best R&B Performance, plus a nomination for Best R&B Song – even Hoskyns had surrendered to its "slick metronome sexgospel" – while the same week it topped the American charts, a song that he'd written for The Bangles, *Manic Monday*, made it to No.2.

Kiss' promise to "show you what it's all about" had definitely been fulfilled. In June 1986, a month after *Parade*'s release, the man who'd quit performing a year ago hit the road once again for a Hit N Run tour, its shows sometimes announced merely hours in advance. In Detroit, *Creem* watched him "knocking off splits, spins and shuck 'n' jive", and, after taking the now 11-piece Revolution to Europe, he left *NME*'s Gavin Martin gasping at Wembley: "I've never seen anything quite like it."

But in October, his manager issued another press release, this time quoting Joni Mitchell. Having told *Rolling Stone* 12 months earlier that *The Hissing Of Summer Lawns* was "the last album he loved all the way through", it now seemed the back-slapping was mutual. "His motivations are growth and experimentation," her words read, "as opposed to formula and hits." To many, of course, this would have been obvious, but what followed still came as a shock. Her compliments accompanied Prince's surprising announcement that The Revolution was over.

Nonetheless, given his habits, not least before *Parade*, this was hardly out of character. In his first MTV interview the previous November, he'd warned of his questing nature. "I don't live in the past. I don't play my old records for that reason. I make a statement, then move on to the next." As they'd probably say under the cherry moon, "Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose." ■

THE SPAGHETTI INCIDENT

"Ladies and gentlemen," announces an MC as lights bathe a stage in purple. "In concert… Prince!" With that, the name of the artist who's borne it since 1958 flashes up onto TV screens. Ten seconds later, now accompanied by an image of a box of 'enriched' spaghetti, an inquiring female voice is heard. "Oh, *that* Prince! What do you mean, 'in concert'?" "In concert," it turns out, "with your Prince spaghetti sauce".

If it wasn't the bum joke that did it, it was probably the commercial's tag line: "*THE ORIGINAL. Since 1912.*" Though the advert was voiced by *Looney Tunes* veteran Stan Freberg, the musician's management suffered a sense of humour failure. They instructed Prince's lawyers to contact the company's president, telling him to desist from using their client's name. "In all these years," Joseph Pellegrino responded to *Time*, "I've never once been sued. I've never even got an angry letter."

"Pipsqueak rocker miffed," wrote the *Weekly World News*, while the *Chicago Tribune* claimed, "So sue us, say the spaghetti folks". But when Prince saw the headlines, he interpreted things differently, later calling it "the cutest thing in the world". Eventually the case came to nothing, perhaps proving that not every penne counts.

Frankie Goes To Hollywood - Liverpool

THERE WERE PERSONNEL PROBLEMS, HUGE RECORDING COSTS AND AN ABORTED COVER VERSION OF A MUCH-DERIDED ROD STEWART NO.1 HIT. SO HOW DID FRANKIE GOES TO HOLLYWOOD'S SECOND AND FINAL ALBUM *LIVERPOOL* EMERGE AS ONE OF THE MOST STRIKING RECORDS OF THE MID-80S?

MATT PHILLIPS

* * *

It's no exaggeration to say that 1984 belonged to Frankie. Trevor Horn produced the three epochal No.1 singles which took on modern society's Big Themes (sex, war, religion) and the epic indulgence that was their debut album, *Welcome To The Pleasuredome.* But were they post-punk pioneers or the first boyband of the 80s? They set out to prove they were the former when embarking on second and final LP, 1986's *Liverpool.*

ZTT label boss Jill Sinclair and husband Horn believed Frankie could strike it big in the US after *Relax* made the Billboard Top 10 in March 1985 – the words 'Village People' were even bandied about. Instead, on their 1985 US tour, the band often opened with Bruce Springsteen's *Born To Run.* In the new Ronald Reagan-anointed United States, this didn't go down too well…

The tour wound down in late spring 1985, but there was increasing hostility between frontman Holly Johnson and The Lads (bassist Mark O'Toole, guitarist Brian 'Nasher' Nash, drummer Peter 'Ped' Gill), with backing vocalist Paul Rutherford in the middle, for reasons both musical and personal.

They all stayed on in Hawaii at the end of the tour and met up in Ireland to start writing their second album in summer '85. Back in Britain, unemployment was nudging three million – Margaret Thatcher was one of the most divisive Prime Ministers in history so the frivolity and excesses of *Pleasuredome* were definitely out. The new album, according to Gill in *Smash Hits,* would be, "more what we really are – five fellas from Liverpool singing songs about the way they feel about things."

Horn was too busy on Yes' *Big Generator* to produce but Stephen Lipson – key musician and engineer on *Pleasuredome,* as well as producer of Propaganda's *A Secret Wish* – was perfectly placed. Still, Johnson was furious that Horn wouldn't be joining them for their all-important sophomore record. Tensions didn't improve when, according to Horn in his book *Adventures In Modern Recording,* one of the first new tracks he heard was the band's cover of Rod Stewart's *Do Ya Think I'm Sexy* featuring Rutherford on lead vocals. The Lads loved it but Johnson did not, and threatened to leave if it was released as the first single. Horn backed down, though now regrets it.

Repairing to Wisseloord Studios in Holland, with Lipson's dream team in tow – keyboard players Andy Richards and Peter-John Vettese, percussionist Luís Jardim and engineer Heff Moraes – the rhythm section laid down grooves while Johnson worked on melodies and lyrics, with an undercurrent of tension.

Holly also had a new boyfriend/manager/minder – Wolfgang Kuhle – and was "loved up", said Lipson to the 80sography podcast, often disappearing for days. "He used to say to me: 'I need two days' notice if you want me to sing'. He wouldn't be there with everyone. I felt like the enemy. I couldn't understand what I'd done apart from trying to help him. He did kind of ruin my life for a few years..."

There was panic as the album deadline approached as all involved realised they didn't have a classic track along the lines of *Relax* or *Two Tribes* in the bag." Horn was helicoptered in towards the end, as studio costs skyrocketed to an estimated £760,000.

But, somehow, *Liverpool* emerged as a striking, sometimes-thrilling slice of pop-prog.

IF IT'S NOT QUITE KITCHEN-SINK FRANKIE, THERE'S A PLEASING IRONY BETWEEN THE STATE-OF-THE-NATION LYRICS AND SUMPTUOUS PRODUCTION

FRANKIE GOES TO HOLLYWOOD
liverpool
(ztds 31)

The bleakness of Thatcher's Britain was reflected in the more hard-hitting lyrical approach of the *Liverpool* LP

* * *

HOLLY JOHNSON WAS FURIOUS THAT TREVOR HORN WOULDN'T BE JOINING THEM FOR THEIR ALL-IMPORTANT SOPHOMORE RECORD

Johnson was singing at full tilt, his melodies original and arresting, and The Lads played a blinder. If it's not quite kitchen-sink Frankie, there's a pleasing irony between Johnson's state-of-the-nation lyrics and the sumptuous production. And it's weirdly influential – you'd imagine It Bites, Tears For Fears and Faith No More had a copy in their back pockets.

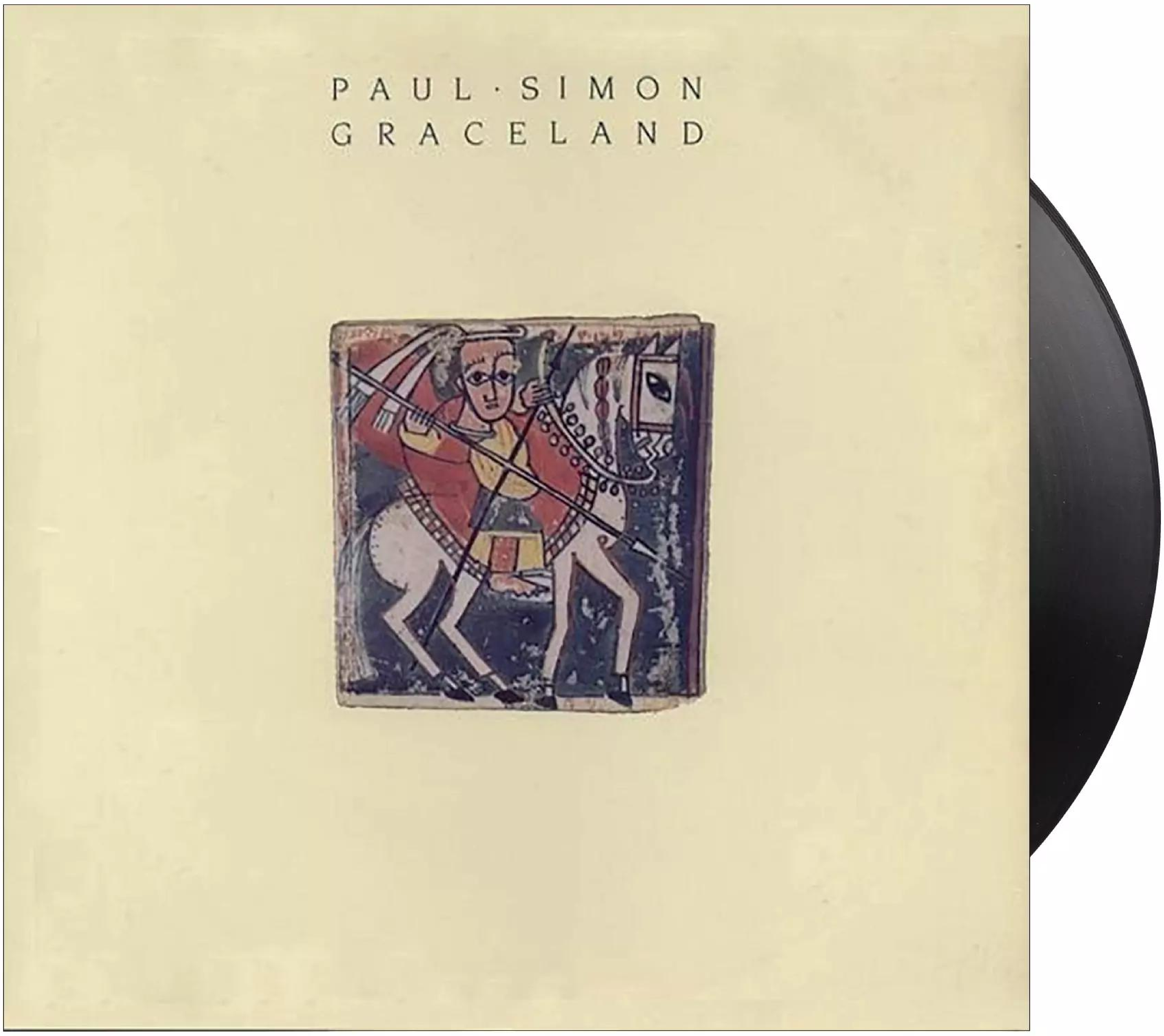
Warriors Of The Wasteland continued in the tradition of striking ZTT album openers. *Pleasuredome*'s title track saw Johnson referencing Samuel Taylor Coleridge, this time it was TS Eliot's *The Wasteland.* Despite O'Toole reckoning that it sounded like Spinal Tap, the song was remixed to create the second single, reaching UK No.19. *Rage Hard* came close to the ABC template of solid grooves and faintly preposterous lyrics – Q magazine even posited that Johnson might be parodying Martin Fry. Holly claimed in *Smash Hits* that his lyric was inspired by Dylan Thomas' poem *Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night.* The album's lead single, released on 25 August 1986, reached UK No.4 and spawned a remarkable 12" version narrated by Pamela Stephenson.

Maximum Joy – named after an early-80s post-punk band – is pure bliss, luxuriating in Lipson's infinite guitar, Johnson's gossamer vocals and ZTT fairy dust. *For Heaven's Sake* is a barmy anti-Thatcher ballad ("She should buy us all a drink") in queasy 6/8 time, featuring a melody that wouldn't be out of place in a Broadway musical. The fun *Lunar Bay* – with Stan Boardman voiceover – and *Watching The Wildlife* are almost impossibly smooth with remarkable instrumental clarity, pointing ahead to Lipson's productions for Prefab Sprout, Annie Lennox and Sophie B Hawkins. The latter got to UK No.28 as the third and final single. *Is There Anybody Out There?* is a fitting end to Frankie's recording career, a majestic ballad with some lovely Johnson vocals and a subtle Richard Niles string arrangement. Adam Sweeting opined in *Q*: "Why on earth didn't somebody give this song to Dusty Springfield?"

Named by ZTT's PR man Paul Morley (Johnson wanted to call it *From Diamond Mine To The Factory*), *Liverpool* was released in October 1986. It was not a commercial disaster, reaching No.5 in the UK and the Top 10 in many other European countries, but only made a disappointing No.88 in the US. It also had a great cover featuring the photography of Anton Corbijn. In *Smash Hits*, Gill described the album as "ten times better" than *Pleasuredome. Q* agreed: "An absolutely unimpeachable mainstream rock record." The *NME* were outraged.

Frankie set off on tour in late 1986 and stayed on the road until Johnson officially left the band in summer '87. ZTT then tried to negotiate a solo contract with him but Kuhle allegedly put a spanner in the works, claiming the company couldn't afford Holly unless they sold their SARM West studio, a comment which led to a court case (Horn claims that he wanted both Frankie and Johnson on ZTT as separate entities). Meanwhile, as litigation continued, Johnson started his solo career with MCA, while Rutherford and The Lads went back to Liverpool. They were also still paying back studio costs until the first greatest hits compilation came out in 1992.

In 2023 Frankie finally reunited, albeit for just one song, *Welcome To The Pleasuredome*, performed at the Eurovision opening concert outside Liverpool's St George's Hall. ■



CLASSIC ALBUM

GRACELAND

PAUL SIMON

THE NEW YORK TROUBADOUR CEMENTED HIS PLACE AS A SOLO STAR WITH HIS HUGELY INFLUENCIAL, YET HIGHLY CONTROVERSIAL SEVENTH SOLO LP, DRAWING ON SOUTH AFRICAN MUSIC AND BRINGING IT INTO HIS OWN

FELIX ROWE

Strange how one of the most popular, celebrated and uplifting records of all time is also one of the most divisive. One whose very existence was allegedly enough to secure its creator pole position on an assassination list. Everything about Paul Simon's *Graceland* is a mass of contradictions – espousing the vitality of African music coming out of Apartheid, while named after the colonial-style home of a white rock and roll icon in the American Deep South. But there's more to *Graceland* than immediately meets the eye – or ear. If it was destined to challenge, to provoke, to ask questions, it does all this and more Yet it remains essentially a pop record at heart, stuffed with radio-friendly hits that continue to pump out regularly.

Paul Simon was 45 years old when the album was released – by pop's standards of the day, an old timer who had no business putting out one of biggest albums to the year, or indeed, of all time. In 1986, he was up against game changing newcomers such as Madonna, the Beastie Boys, Metallica, all operating in very different genres, but captivating the youth.

While Simon was still a huge bankable star with big label backing, his celebrity was increasingly based on pass successes, shifting from counter-culture pin-up to adult contemporary heritage act. By this point, Simon's relationship with Art Garfunkel had soured, his marriage with Carrie Fisher broken down, and he was experiencing a commercial downturn after his previous record, 1983's *Hearts and Bones*, failed to light up the charts. The casual observer would be forgiven for thinking his best times were already behind him.

He had experimented with world rhythms before (for example, the Brazilian influence *Me And Julio Down By the Schoolyard*). But it was after discovering a tape, *Accordion Jive Hits* by the Boyoyo Boys, that Simon was drawn to South African music, taken by the vibrant rhythms and sounds which he saw as upbeat and summery, and reminiscent of 1950s R&B.

Rather than simply using the top American session players to emulate an African style, as his record label suggested, Simon was adamant that the sound and input must be the authentic real deal. *Graceland* as we know it could never have been conceived under those circumstances.

He favoured collaboration rather than imitation. The African elements aren't just surface decoration; the kind of superficial additions – the obligatory string part or gospel choir – so often added at the 11th hour to spice up an otherwise bog-standard pop arrangement. Rather, they are integral to the heartbeat of each track – take those incredible vocal chants in *I Know What I Know* as the clearest example.

Working with Simon's regular engineer Roy Halee and South African Hilton Rosenthal, recording began with a fortnight stint in Johannesburg. Despite the jovial nature of performing, Simon became aware of the uneasy atmosphere that surfaced around night-time curfews enforced by apartheid. Additional sessions followed in New York, and London's iconic Abbey Road, Simon flying the various South African musicians over to perform.

Simon's conventional songwriting approach was jettisoned, with the process reverse engineered. Rather than writing song first then filling out the arrangement, he did the opposite, building from the ground (or groove) upwards, with heavy leaning on the input of his collaborators. Halee said: "we were going with nothing, so it was a gamble. A lot of people thought we nuts" (J. Marre documentary).

The songs evolved naturally out of improvised jams, often incorporating various folk motifs or elements from the collaborators' existing repertoires. It was all about capturing feel, rhythm, groove, emotion.

Though not a futuristic-sounding record aesthetically, digital editing – then still in its relative infancy – proved integral in piecing it all together, turning the loose jams into more conventional song structures. Simon's words and topline melodies would then follow later. In practice, he found the lyrics took an unusually long time to refine, working over many months or rewriting and tweaking to complement the idiosyncratic African rhythms.

Though the album's very notion was a powerful political statement in itself, Simon avoided explicit political commentary in the lyrics. Typically, phrases were chosen based on their number of syllables and their natural accentuation – 'sophisticated lyrics for sophisticated rhythms'. Or echoing the phonetic sounds and rhythms he heard in the African music. A real fluidity in the lyrics; despite a laboured and meticulously crafted process, the end result comes across very off the cuff and conversational; a stream-of-consciousness flow with an irregular meter.

Musically, the basslines are integral to *Graceland*. Fretless bassist, Bakithi Kumalo underpins the record with his rubbery, fluid and dynamic grooves, keeping things

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THE SONGS ▶▶

1 THE BOY IN THE BUBBLE

A jittery accordion performed by Forere Motloheloa announces the record, before a thunderous drum leads into a bouncy travelling song, featuring the rubbery fretless bass and Simon's trademark dextrous wordplay heard throughout the album. It's a fairly low-key opening, subtly hinting at what's to come, while devoid of the more explicit South African character revealed later. The album's third single, it peaked at No.15 on the US Album Rock Tracks chart and reached No.26 in the UK.

2 GRACELAND

The song whose themes came to define the record, the idea of taking a journey – both physical and spiritual – at a time of personal crisis, in hope of finding inner peace. Simon's lyrical refinement from the original 'driving through a wasteland' to 'Graceland' was a good move, switching from the desolate to something carrying a sense of hope and redemption. Released as the second single, it's charting was disappointing, but as the album gathered momentum it went on to win a Grammy.

3 I KNOW WHAT I KNOW

An album highlight, surely one of the most uplifting and life-affirming tracks ever committed to tape, thanks to the contributions of General MD Shirinda and the Gaza Sisters, demonstrating in a nutshell how the clash of cultures and ideas worked so well. Featuring shimmering guitar work, a shuffling beat and Simon's stream-of-consciousness delivery.

4 GUMBOOTS

A brief, upbeat ditty, with a conversational, free-flowing vocal, featuring – and based on a track by – the Boyoyo Boys, the group that initially inspired Simon and kickstarted the whole project.

5 DIAMONDS ON THE SOLES OF HER SHOES

A big single, opening with a stunning a capella section from Ladysmith Black Mambazo, then evolving into an upbeat skittish track complete with brash horn section. In retrospect, it's hard to imagine the album without this defining centrepiece, but, in fact, *Diamonds* was a late addition, only produced after main sessions had wrapped up. As the South African musicians were booked to join Simon for an *SNL* performance, they took the opportunity to record the track in New York. A decision that paid off.

6 YOU CAN CALL ME AL

The big single with the huge singalong chorus, its catchiness belies the complexity of the asymmetric rhythmical vocals. Bakithi Kumalo deserves credit for one of the finest bass guitar breakdowns in pop history (although his fine playing is enhanced further by some nifty editing, as the riff is doubled, with the second half played in reverse). Though initially underperforming, it proved to be a sleeper hit, rising to No.23 in the US, and enjoying even bigger success in the UK, peaking at No.4. Today, it remains one of Simon's most popular calling cards and a live staple.

7 UNDER AFRICAN SKIES

A rare moment on the record that directly acknowledged Africa. The inclusion of guest vocals from Simon's friend, Linda Ronstadt, was controversial and condemned by critics, due to her previously accepting a staggering $500,000 to perform at the segregated Sun City Resort in South Africa. The song itself is a pretty, slower duet, almost reggae-like in rhythm, though Ronstadt's vocal lending a country twang. Despite the surrounding controversies, musically it's a highlight of *Graceland*. The track would later lend its title to a documentary about the album.

8 HOMELESS

Another beautiful a capella section featuring Ladysmith Black Mambazo, built around a traditional Zulu folk song that was adapted by Josep Shabalala and the group. Recorded in Abbey Road, following a fruitless session the day before, the vocal group went back to their hotel, practised and prayed, resulting in the stunning version included on the album.

9 CRAZY LOVE, VOL. II

One of the slower and more contemplative tracks, perhaps drawing on Simon's recent divorce from Carrie Fisher. The song is carried along on the characteristic guitar playing of Ray Phiri, performed with the group Stimela.

10 THAT WAS YOUR MOTHER

An up-tempo ditty, featuring Rockin' Dopsie and the Twisters, and performed in the zydeco style, with accordion (played by Rockin' Dopsie) and washboard. Recorded in Louisiana, it has a Delta vibe, incorporating a blues influence not yet showcased on the record.

11 ALL AROUND THE WORLD OR THE MYTH OF FINGERPRINTS

The album closes with the most conventional rock song, with processed drums and chugging bass. Stemming out of a 'jam' with Los Lobos, they would later claim their creative contributions were not sufficiently acknowledged by Simon.

THE VIDEOS

YOU CAN CALL ME AL

With the MTV era in full swing, Paul Simon capitalised on the blossoming format, calling on his pal, *Saturday Night Live*'s Chevy Chase, and it resembles a skit from the show. Like the album, it's all about the performance, rather than flashy effects – the perfect comedy timing of Chase and Simon, almost passing for identical twins, if not for the ridiculous height difference. Chase eggs up his performance, while Simon plays the stoney-faced straight man (eventually breaking character). Directed by *SNL*'s Gary Weis.

THE BOY IN THE BUBBLE

A sophisticated and stylised treatment for its time, using cut-out collage style animation with imagery that reflects the culture clash of the lyrics and influences, contrasting rural African visuals with the built-up New York skyline. It's the only promo to use overtly political imagery and commentary, though in referencing American President assassination attempts and Cold War imagery rather than South African apartheid. Directed by Jim Blashfield (whose credits include Tears For Fears, Peter Gabriel and Kate Bush).

DIAMONDS ON THE SOLES OF HER SHOES

With the dancers and players performing beside Simon, it's a powerful display of unity set against apartheid South Africa. Yet there's still a subtle imbalance of power as Simon, the only white man, is the central focus, with the black performers in a supporting role. Shot on a stage resembling an African desert, it's a colourful scene contrasted with black and white footage that breaks the illusion – a neat metaphor hinting at the American artifice that separates the reality.

> "I WAS TAKING THESE ABSURDIST LYRICS THAT I THOUGHT HAD NO PLACE WITH THE RHYTHM TRACK AND FINALLY SAYING, WELL MAYBE IT DOES"
>
> **PAUL SIMON**

moving along. (Off the back of *Graceland*, Kumalo would go on to play with other Western acts including Cyndi Lauper, while also playing on later Paul Simon albums.) Album highlights, *Diamonds On The Soles Of Her Shoes* and *Homeless* feature Ladysmith Black Mambazo who perform, Isicathamiya, a traditional Zulu all male a capella music with associated choreography.

Besides African musicians, Simon also incorporated Creole and Zydeco music – again drawing on the African influence though explored via the America diaspora – and Mexican-American group, Los Lobos. The record also features the all-American Everly Brothers, and contributions from drummer Steve Gadd, as well as guitarist Adrian Belew (King Crimson/David Bowie).

The juxtaposition of explicit American imagery with the African music was an intentional device – though initially tussling with the apparent contradiction, Simon realised it was part of the record's unique charm. As Simon explained in an official retrospective documentary: "I was taking these absurdist lyrics that I thought had no place with the rhythm track and finally saying, well maybe it does have a place." Crucially, it would make *Graceland* more accessible to the popular audience, offering something familiar to hang on to, while opening them up to new sounds.

The idea of visiting Elvis' home may seem incongruous when set to African music, but it's that idea of redemption through a journey; a pilgrimage – the notion transcends Elvis to become something more universal.

The iconic cover art plays into these themes – a fifteenth century Ethiopian representation of St George (reflecting the image of a typical Medieval crusading knight) – evoking the clash of cultures; the uneasy Western encroachment into foreign lands, under the guise of spiritual enlightenment.

Graceland wasn't conceived in a bubble. It followed a long list of artists making explicitly anti-Apartheid statements: Gil Scott-Heron's *Johannesburg* (1975), Peter Gabriel's *Biko* (1980), The Specials' *Free Nelson Mandela*, (1984) Stevie Wonder's *It's Wrong (Apartheid)* (1985), and Steve Van Zandt's supergroup protest song, *Sun City* (1985), the latter of which Simon chose not to perform on, due to "making his own statement" with *Graceland*.

Simon took a lot of stick, not only for his apparent lyrical ambivalence in the face of human rights abuses, but in flouting the UN cultural boycott of South African apartheid – supposedly even facing assassination threats from the political action group, AZAPO. The involvement of Linda Ronstadt, who performs on *Under African Skies*, was controversial; a clumsy move at best, Ronstadt having previously taken a hefty fee to perform at the Sun City resort to a segregated white audience. Ronstadt was one of several Western artists called out for having done so, including Queen, Elton John and Frank Sinatra.

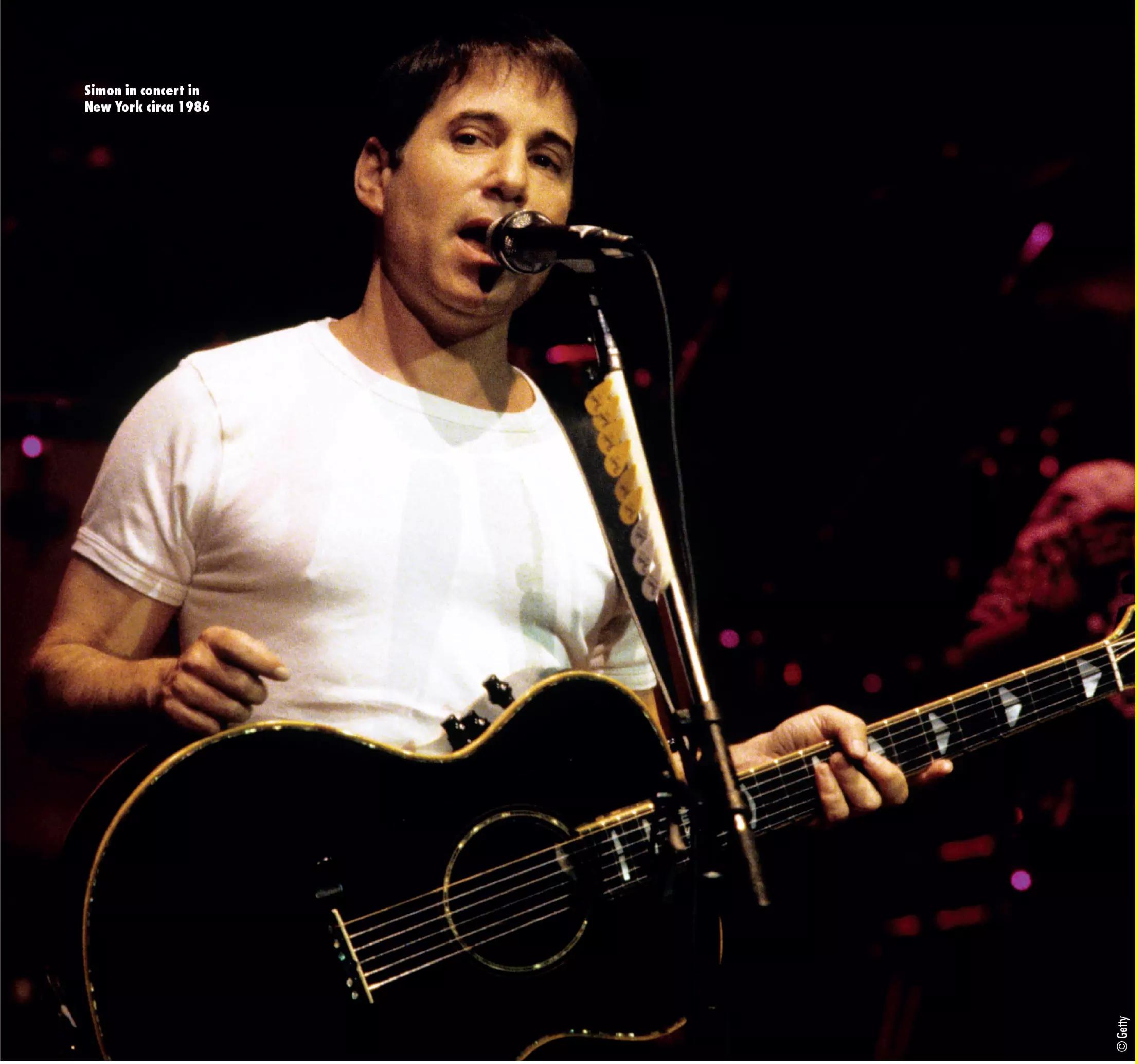
Inevitably, *Graceland* has faced accusations of cultural appropriation – a later concept and criticism also levied at Band Aid/Live Aid, another contemporary milestone to put Africa centre stage in the wider global consciousness. Simon could at least argue that his project actively involved its people. If Band Aid was a bunch of white westerners singing a political song about Africans, then *Graceland* was a white westerner singing apolitical songs with Africans. Of the two, *Graceland* is fundamentally collaborative, devoid of the solemn preachiness associated with commenting from distance.

Conscious to remain above board, Simon paid his collaborators excessively well – three times more than the standard session rate – offering royalties to those who contributed creatively. He apparently took no payment on the accompanying tour, to ensure that the South African musicians were sufficiently compensated. Simon would later say, "there were no inferiors or superiors, just an acknowledgement of everybody's work as a musician" (*National Geographic*, 2012).

Even so, perhaps owing in part to the loose, improvisational approach to building ideas, some contributors, including Steve Berlin of Los Lobos and Rockin' Dopsie (both Americans), and Ray Phiri, would later claim a lack of due credit and royalties for their input in the album. That said, both Rockin' Dopsie and Phiri acknowledged benefitting considerably from the international exposure.

For some, *Graceland* perpetuates negative tropes surrounding the representation of 'mystical' black characters in Hollywood movies, a cultural criticism made by African-American director Spike Lee, who suggests that said characters are introduced, not to share their own stories, but instead merely to further the redemption arc of the male white protagonist.

The notion certainly fits Simon's own story of travelling to Johannesburg to 'find himself'; the experience framed through the prism of improving his own personal outlook on life, rather than the people he encounters. In his own mini-documentary, Simon says: "For me, *Graceland* was a learning experience of a


Simon in concert in New York circa 1986

© Getty

uniquely elevated level in my life, musically, politically, everything about growing up. It's the gift that I got."

Nevertheless, *Graceland* would spur a critical reawakening, giving Simon his highest US chart entry in yonks – surprisingly not hitting No.1, but going on to shift over 16 million units. It won Grammys for 'Album of the Year' (1987) and 'Record of the Year' (1988), while a hat-trick was secured with Ladysmith Black Mambazo's Simon-produced *Shaka Zulu* snagging 'Best Traditional Folk Recording' (1988). Michael Jackson wanted a piece of the action, recruiting Ladysmith Black Mambazo for his 1988 *Moonwalker* film.

More recently, *Graceland* was added to the National Register of Recordings for its cultural significance. *Graceland*'s influence is self-evident on later acts as diverse as Vampire Weekend and Gorillaz, whose upcoming LP leans heavily into world music.

Simon would explore a similar premise on his follow-up album, *The Rhythm Of The Saints* (1990), this time working with Brazilian musicians, again to acclaim, albeit nowhere on the same scale. *Graceland* remains the consummate Paul Simon solo record: iconic and perfectly executed.

Today, some 40 years on, *Graceland* still sounds fresh. Although it depended on the latest digital editing tools, it bears little of the mid-80s production hallmarks, so prevalent of the era, that would fix it to a specific moment in time. There's very little treatment or distorting effects on the instruments. The instrumentation sounds pure and clean, bursting out of the speakers with immediacy. While the album's arrangements are extremely busy and constantly moving, they have plenty of space in which to move about.

The resultant mood is upbeat and celebratory – 'vibrancy' is a term Bob Dylan use to describe Simon's music, and that really applies to *Graceland*. It sounds so unlike any other major international pop records coming out in 1986. To the unaccustomed, it manages to sound exotic and enticing, yet equally so familiar – highlighting that the music of disparate cultures, though alien in many respects, is actually nor so far removed. And as trite as it inevitably sounds, *Graceland* brings the universal and uniting power of music into sharp relief.

It's easy to sneer from the sidelines; and some very valid questions were raised. But strip all the baggage and politics away – impossible as that might be – and *Graceland* is undoubtedly a record with heart, built on mutual admiration. Speaking on a Paul Simon documentary, Joseph Shabalala of Ladysmith Black Mambazo said affectionately: "Who is this guy? He was hiding himself in America? This is my brother! I call him brother every day, because of the music. Music is something like prayer."

Graceland was divisive. Echoing the lyrics of the record's most famous song, "All along there were incidents and accidents; there were hints and allegations." Yet while others fixated on making powerful statements, Simon simply fixated on making great music. And that was perhaps one of the most powerful and enduring statements of all. ■

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Goth Goes Global

AFTER THE POP EXPLOSION OF 1985, THE FOLLOWING YEAR SAW ALTERNATIVE MUSIC BREAK THROUGH TO THE MAINSTREAM, TAKING BANDS WITH DARKER LEANINGS OUT OF THE SHADOWS AND INTO THE LIGHT

WESLEY DOYLE

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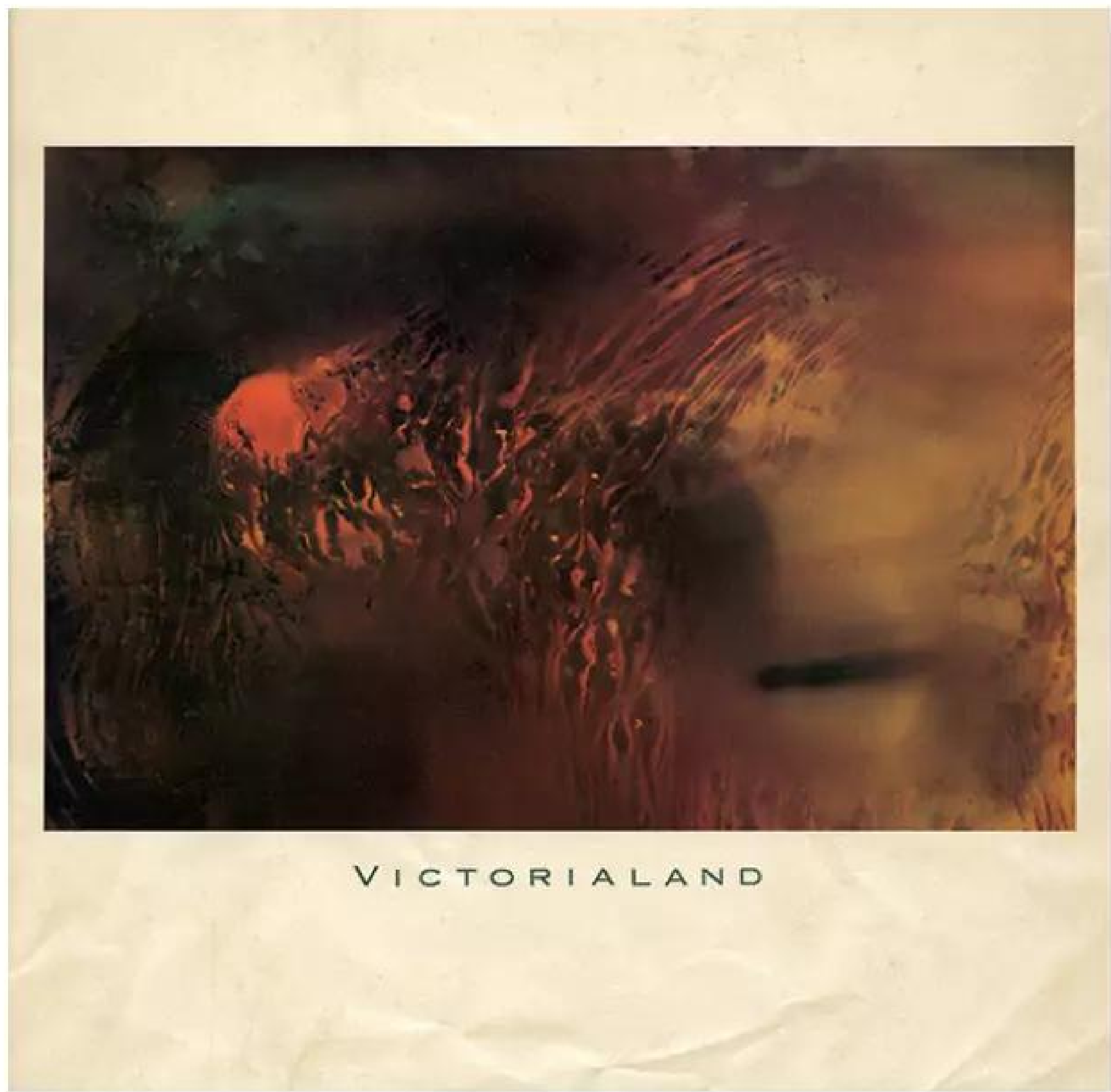
If 1985 had been the year alternative music knocked on the door, 1986 was when it took its pointed boot and kicked it in altogether. The Sisters Of Mercy, New Model Army, Gene Loves Jezebel, The Damned, Killing Joke and The Cure had all released albums that slithered into the business end of the charts the previous year, earning a couple of *Top Of The Pops* appearances for some. But 1986 was different – this was an assault on the mainstream. The underground was going overground.

Leading the charge were The Damned. They'd enjoyed something of a rebirth in 1985, with their *Phantasmagoria* album – which foregrounded singer Dave Vanian's gothic tendencies – giving them their first Top 20 album. In January 1986 their cover of Barry Ryan's 1968 smash *Eloise* took them to the Top 10 for the only time in their career. As a result, the vampiric Vanian's two-tone fright wig was beamed into the nation's homes via appearances not only on *Top Of The Pops* but also *Saturday Live* and *The Tube*. Suddenly goths weren't just lurking in the shadows, they were prime time entertainment.

In April, as a pre-cursor to their Top 10 singles collection *Standing On A Beach*, The Cure released a new version of their 1979 single *Boys Don't Cry* which climbed to No.22 in the UK charts. For many of the band's recent converts – fans picked up via their comparatively poppy run of singles such as *The Lovecats*, *Inbetween Days* and *Close To Me*, *Standing On A Beach* was an opportunity to show the band's breadth, joining the dots between debut single *Killing An Arab* through murkier fare such as *The Hanging Garden*, *Charlotte Sometimes* and *A Forest.* Their North American Beach Party tour was the start of their path to becoming one of the biggest bands in the US, while closer to home they played their first Glastonbury headline slot. With Robert Smith's smudged lipstick and bird's nest hair as recognisable as his distinctive vocal delivery, goth had its first bona fide pop star, and one that appealed to die-hard fans as much as casual listeners.

Even though The Cult didn't release any new music in 1986 they were still active, promoting the previous year's *Love*, an album that spawned three hit singles, including the deathless drivetime smash *She Sells Sanctuary*. Supporting Simple Minds for select dates on their Once Upon A Time tour, The Cult were already growing into the far rockier beast that would reemerge the following year. In fact, these shows saw them debut several songs that would appear on 1987's multi-platinum *Electric*.

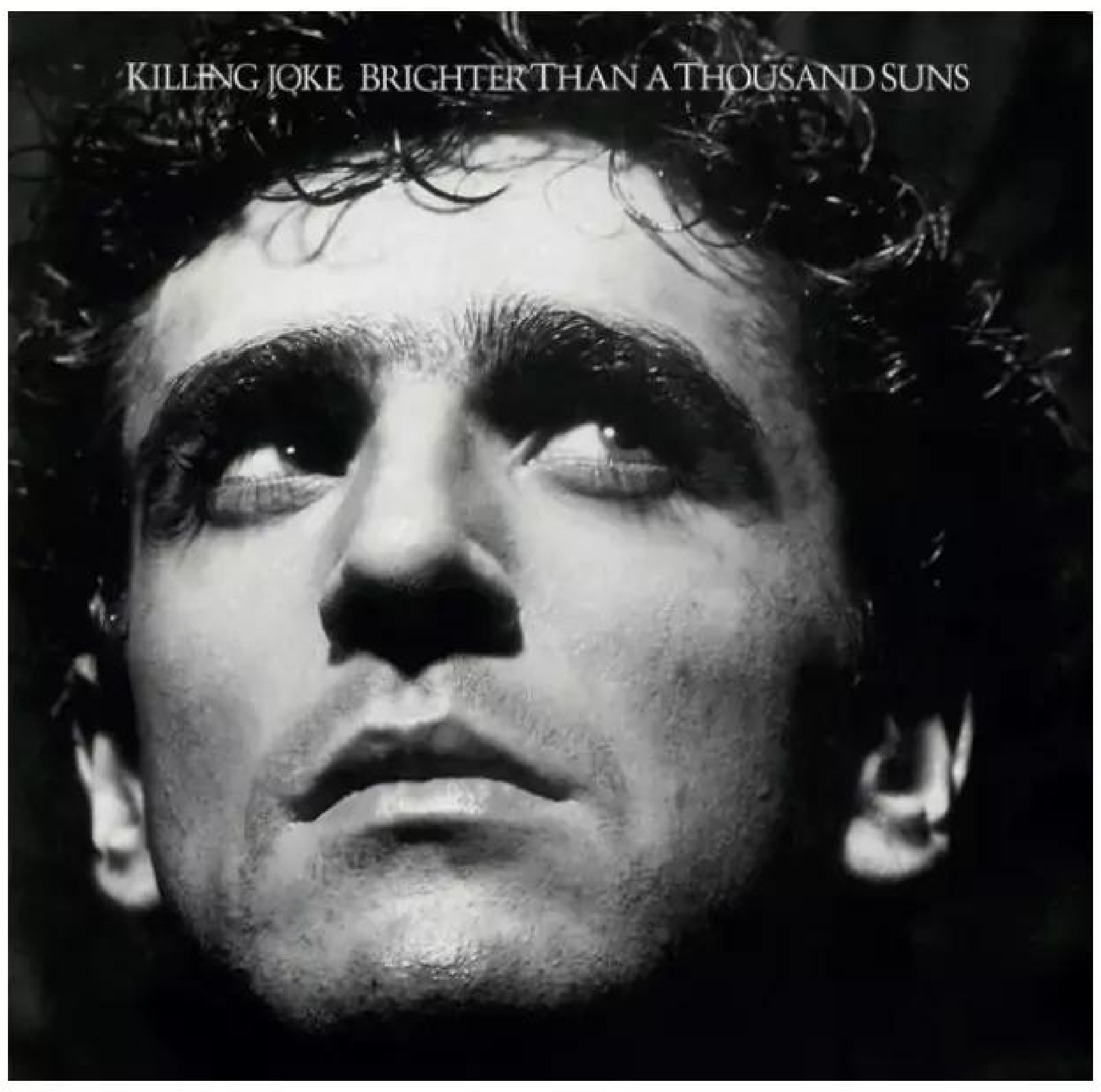
With Robert Smith's smudged lipstick and bird's nest hair, goth had its first bona fide pop star



Cocteau Twins' stunning fourth album *Victorialand* reached No.10 in the UK album charts

Goth made its presence felt on the UK's festival circuit too. Alongside The Cure's Worthy Farm appearance, the Friday night of that hoary old rock institution, the Reading Festival, was headlined by one of post-punk's originators, Killing Joke. Starting a tradition, the 1986 festival was the inaugural 'Goth Friday' for the festival, an unspoken trend that carried on for the next few years. On that August night in 1986, the bill also included Doctor And The Medics, The Bolshoi, March Violets and The Mission.

The headline slot would prove to be something of a peak for Killing Joke. Having released their *Brighter Than A Thousand Suns* album in June, the band had failed to replicate the success of 1985's *Night Time.* Rather its follow-up was a more synth-heavy record that failed to find favour with their fans both old and new. While the band toured the album throughout the year, line-up and direction changes were imminent. Killing Joke's predicament highlighted many a goth-adjacent bands' central tension in 1986: how do you reach wider audiences without betraying what made you special in the first place?


KILLING JOKE BRIGHTER THAN A THOUSAND SUNS

Landing at UK No.54, *Brighter Than A Thousand Suns* failed to bring Killing Joke a wider fanbase

This was something that Siouxsie & The Banshees negotiated masterfully. The band had always operated on their own terms, but April's *Tinderbox* LP marked a new peak in their commercial viability. Recorded at Berlin's Hansa, the album benefited from having been road-tested with new guitarist John Valentine Carruthers before recording. The result was focused and urgent, driven by a raw energy that made it more immediate than its predecessor.

The lead single *Cities in Dust* had been a hit the previous October, and the follow-up saw them make an appearance on *The Tube* The song became inescapable on both radio and the nascent MTV (see box out), introducing the band to audiences who'd never ventured near an 'alternative' club. What made their success particularly edifying was that they'd achieved it without softening their edges. Siouxsie's image remained confrontational, her vocals occasionally abrasive, the band's sound still challenging. If anything, mainstream success brought their uncompromising vision to a wider audience rather than the other way around.

Another band who stuck to their guns and were rewarded for doing so were the Cocteau Twins. June's *Victorialand* was recorded as a duo – bassist Simon Raymonde having been coopted by This Mortal Coil – and with minimal percussion, the album is the closest they came to creating ambient music. Robin Guthrie's frosty soundscapes left space for Liz Fraser's trilling vocals, adding colour to the misty sonic palette.

Alternative nation

When MTV's *120 Minutes* first flickered onto television screens on 10 March 1986, it carved out a revolutionary space for alternative music on mainstream TV. Airing Sunday nights from midnight to 2am, the show opened with host JJ Jackson declaring viewers were entering a "Top 40-free zone" – a promise that would reshape the musical landscape in the States.

The program emerged at a crucial moment when MTV's daytime rotation focused heavily on pop and hair metal, leaving underground and college rock largely invisible to mainstream audiences. Featuring a healthy mix of hardcore, electronic and New Wave music from both sides of the Atlantic, it helped launch British bands such as The Cure, Depeche Mode, Siouxsie & The Banshees and The Psychedelic Furs into the US mainstream. These artists would become pillars of alternative music but were then largely confined to college radio and independent record stores.

It wasn't just the big hitters who got airtime: Gene Loves Jezebel, Love And Rockets, The Bolshoi and Peter Murphy all received heavy rotation, which resulted in success far greater than they enjoyed in the UK. The show didn't just play videos – it legitimised alternative music as a viable cultural movement and defined a generation of outsiders.

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Siouxsie & The Banshees' seventh album *Tinderbox* was a highlight of the year

It was their most ethereal work yet and despite being released on the independent 4AD, it became the band's first visit to the UK Top 10. It also served as a reminder that to achieve commercial success artists didn't have to commercialise their sound.

Conversely, **Nick Cave And The Bad Seeds** doubled down on the darkness with *Your Funeral… My Trial* and failed to trouble the charts (although it did hit the top spot in the independent one). One of Cave's most celebrated albums, it saw him consolidate his various personas on a single record: the broken balladeer, roaring punk and elegantly wasted wastrel were all present and correct, with the Bad Seeds shifting gears to match every mood. While it would be a couple of years before the mainstream truly embraced Cave, if you read the then weekly music press, he was a constant, brooding presence. A dark star in waiting.

Someone else who didn't commercialise their sound yet still found themselves on national UK television was **Diamanda Galás**. While promoting her album *Saint Of The Pit*, she made an unforgettable appearance on *The Tube* performing *Deliver Me*. This was the first time many had seen Galás – and heard her eight-octave voice – and her intense performance left jaws on the floor. People may not have liked it, but they would never forget it.

> Nick Cave And The Bad Seeds doubled down on the darkness with Your Funeral… My Trial

Nick Cave performs at the Futurama festival in Belgium in 1986

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Nothing better exemplified 1986's strange collision between underground credibility and chart success than Doctor And The Medics hitting No.1 in June with their cover of Norman Greenbaum's *Spirit In The Sky*. On the surface, it looked like novelty record territory – and to be fair, there was plenty of end-of-the-pier excess in the execution – but the band had serious underground credentials. The Doctor (or Clive as his mum calls him) had been instrumental in launching Alice in Wonderland, the club that succeeded the legendary Batcave as London's premier goth hangout. The club represented a new strain of slightly psychedelicised goth, attracting members of The Cult, **The Damned**, and Zodiac Mindwarp. It was also where The Mission would make their debut under the name The Sisterhood, before having to change it (see box out). Even the Doctor's backing singers, Wendi and Colette (performing as The Anadin Brothers), had goth previous, having appeared in The Cult's *Rain* video the previous year. When they topped the charts, they brought a slice of London's underground with them, however briefly.

But perhaps the year's most remarkable success story was that of The Mission, a band that didn't even exist at the start of the year. Former members of The Sisters Of Mercy – a band who released their debut album *First And Last and Always* and played a high-profile show at London's Royal Albert Hall the previous year – guitarist Wayne Hussey and bassist Craig Adams left the band during sessions for a follow-up album. While the smart money was on singer Andrew Eldritch, it was the 'boys-least-likely-to' Hussey and Adams who made good on their erstwhile band's promise, surpassing The Sister's commercial success within months.

After the legal wranglings about their initial choice of name, The Mission released their debut single *Serpents Kiss* in April. One of several songs originally earmarked for the doomed second Sisters' album, it showcased what would become The Mission's signature sound: soaring guitars, melodic hooks and unashamed classic rock influences. It was gothic rock grandeur with Led Zeppelin's swagger, and audiences responded immediately. When they signed to Mercury Records in June – major label money backing a band barely six months old – it signalled the industry could see money in backing 'alternative acts'. And those instincts were right. *Stay With Me* hit the Top 30 in July, and September's *Wasteland* just missed the Top 10. The Mission were one of the fastest-rising bands in Britain and debut *God's Own Medicine* delivered an album of glossy, melodic goth rock that climbed

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The Damned released their seventh studio album *Anything* in December 1986

into the UK Top 20. Suddenly they were playing venues their previous band had taken years to fill, appearing on mainstream television, and earning *NME* cover stories. The Mission's classic rock approach to goth – more concerned with anthems than atmosphere – may have divided purists, but it conquered the masses and set themselves up for even greater success.

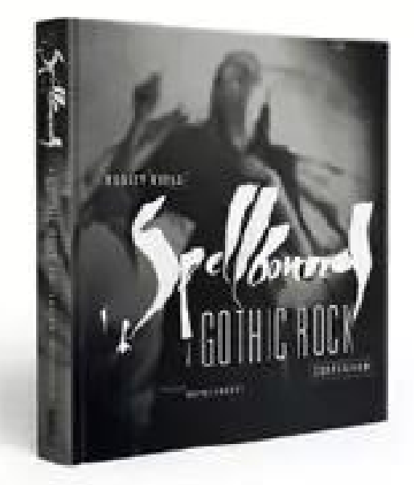
> The Mission's classic rock approach to goth may have divided purists, but it conquered the masses

For Depeche Mode, 1986 saw them nail their colours to the mast with *Black Celebration*, their darkest album yet. Recorded in Berlin, songwriter Martin Gore's mediations on the seamier side of life were given import by Dave Gahan's commanding baritone, and the combination of samples and industrial rhythms created stadium-sized anthems that retained a grit and credibility. Always a hot ticket in Europe, the 77-date tour in support of the album took the band into the big league, particularly in the United States where they played to huge audiences in arenas across the country. Mega-stardom beckoned.

But the Basildon boys weren't the only UK act to be enjoying a surprisingly high profile. Two-pronged promotion on US college rock radio and the newly launched MTV's *120 Minutes* programme [see box out] provided a crucial infrastructure for bands from abroad to reap Stateside success. The latter was particularly instrumental in introducing audiences to new acts. Suddenly, bands who'd never dreamt of daytime MTV rotation had a platform. *120 Minutes* would become essential viewing for anyone interested in music beyond the mainstream, and while it took time to find its full audience, 1986 was the year it started building alternative music's television presence. UK bands who may not have enjoyed the same success as their peers in their home country soon saw their videos being beamed into middle-American homes with incredible results. Bands such as Gene Loves Jezebel, The Bolshoi, and March Violets found themselves with new audiences far removed from the ones that came to see them headline the Marquee in rainy old London. Love And Rockets – the three members of goth rock pioneers Bauhaus that weren't Peter Murphy – enjoyed the greatest success. September's *Express*, a rockier follow-up to their 1985 debut, perfected their mix of glam rock thrash with noisy psychedelia. Tracks such as *Kundalini Express* and *Yin and Yang (The Flowerpot Man)* found a home on *120 Minutes* and via constant touring in North America and Canada, the band played to audiences that dwarfed what they could expect at home.

1986 had been a defining year for bands of a darker nature, with a good showing in the music press end-of-year round-ups. While it might be expected to see Nick Cave, The Mission and Cocteau Twins high in *NME* and *Melody Maker* polls, it was the fact that all three had featured in the pop magazines such as *Smash Hits* and *No.1*. In their 27 August issue, *Smash Hits* gave The Sisterhood's *Gift* and Nick Cave And The Bad Seeds' *Kicking Against The Pricks* both 7 out of 10, alongside a Cocteau Twins poster. They even called The Mission's *God's Own Medicine* "swoonsomely enchanting".

By the end of the year, black was the new black and, armed with hairspray and eyeliner, the goths would slither into 1987 well and truly part of the mainstream. ■



Wesley Doyle's new book *Spellbound: A Gothic Rock Compendium* will be published by Ruffian Press in early 2026.

Two-Five-Zero-Zero-Zero

The Sisters Of Mercy's Andrew Eldritch

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When The Sisters of Mercy split, it was guitarist Wayne Hussey and bassist Craig Adams who made the first move. Recruiting second guitarist Simon Hinkler and drummer Mick Brown, the band played their debut show in January and toured in support of The Cult the following month. There was a problem with the name they'd chosen: The Sisterhood. This irked The Sisters OfMercy frontman Andrew Eldritch to such a degree, he rush-released a single under the same name as a spoiler tactic. *Giving Ground* reached the top of the independent charts and effectively forced Hussey and Adams to find a new name. So, The Mission were born.

This wasn't the end of it all though, as Eldritch, Hussey and Adams were all signed individually to a publishing deal with RCA Music, with an advance going to the first of the trio to produce an album. Armed with the songs proposed for the aborted second Sisters' album (proposed title: *Left On Mission And Revenge*), Hussey and Adams were best placed to claim the advance, worth £25,000. To prevent this, Eldritch quickly cobbled together a mini-album of polished up demos called *Gift*, and rush-released it before The Mission could get their debut album out. A furious RCA Music paid Eldritch the advance but subsequently dropped him. Not that it bothered the Machiavellian singer, the important thing was he'd got another one over on Hussey and Adams. To drive the point home further, the first track on *Gift* opened with future Sister Patricia Morrison intoning the words "Two-five-zero-zero-zero" – the amount of the publishing advance.

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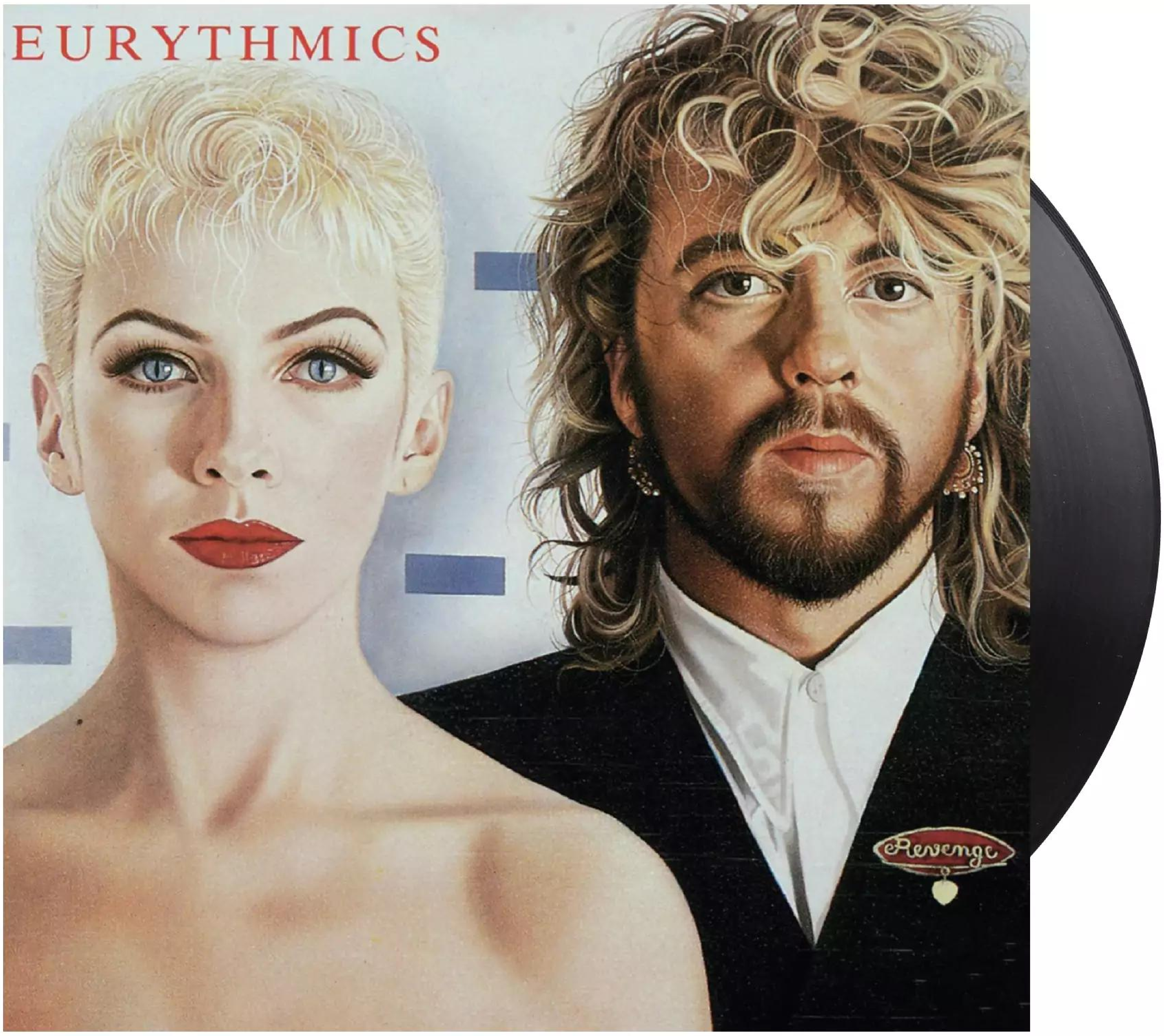
The Mission on stage at Brixton Academy in support of *God's Own Medicine*



CLASSIC ALBUM

EURYTHMICS

REVENGE

A DIVISIVE DISC AMONG THEIR FANBASE, THE DUO'S FIFTH ALBUM SAW THEIR DIRECTION DICTATED BY THEIR SUCCESS, ADOPTING AN EXPANSIVE SOUND TO ROCK THOSE ARENAS.

MARK LINDORES

Although classic hits such as *Sweet Dreams (Are Made Of This)*, *Here Comes The Rain Again* and *Who's That Girl?* had firmly established Eurythmics as one of the definitive acts (along with other dynamic duos Yazoo and Soft Cell) of the synth-pop genre in the early 80s, it was their decision to temporarily unplug their synthesizers and swap gender bending for genre blending and embrace a rockier, more R&B-influenced sound in 1985 that proved key to their longevity and brought them their greatest success.

While some hardcore fans lamented the sparse synth and soul sound of the duo's early work, not to mention the stylistic shift of frontwoman Annie Lennox from androgynous ingenue to a more conventional beauty, Eurythmics' change of direction paid off. Their fourth album, the boundary-breaking *Be Yourself Tonight* had become the duo's biggest-seller, propelled by the huge success of their first (and only) UK No.1 single, celestial singalong *There Must Be An Angel (Playing With My Heart)* and feminist anthem *Sisters Are Doin' It For Themselves*, which saw Annie hold her own against the Queen Of Soul, Aretha Franklin.

"People still think of Eurythmics being really electronic because of *Sweet Dreams* but we actually grew quickly," Dave Stewart told *Stereogum*. "We went through all kinds of genres – R&B on *Sisters Are Doin' It For Themselves*, and then just when people thought, "Oh, we've got it," we're doing this kind of rock-type thing with *Missionary Man* and all that so we would never get put into a box. I really am pleased that I didn't get stuck in a genre

© Getty

THE SONGS ▶▶

① MISSIONARY MAN

A bombastic opener which showcases the new band firing on all cylinders, with a soaring vocal from Joniece and squalling harmonica lending a bluesy vibe. Influenced predominantly by Annie's brief marriage, the lyric also takes aim at political figures and world leaders and their relentless quest for power. Released as the fourth and final single, it stalled at No.31 in the UK but fared better in the US where it reached No.14 (their final US Top 20 hit) and earned them a Grammy for Best Rock Performance By A Duo Or Group With Vocals.

② THORN IN MY SIDE

Beginning with a spoken intro that evokes the classic 60s girl groups, *Thorn In My Side's* seething lyric is sweetened by a joyous upbeat melody, glorious wall of sound production and an incredibly catchy "Run Run Run Run" hook which echoes The Crystals' *Da Doo Ron Ron*. Released as the second single in the UK, it became the duo's ninth (and final) top ten single.

③ WHEN TOMORROW COMES

The lead single from the LP, *When Tomorrow Comes* was co-written by Dave and Annie with their keyboard player Pat Seymour who had worked with the group since the Touch Tour. An optimistic, upbeat number about undying love, it is elevated by a killer saxophone solo worthy of Clarence Clemons' work with *Born To Run*-era Springsteen. Stalling at No.30 in the UK, it was a disappointing lead position but the song has remained a firm fan favourite.

④ THE LAST TIME

A catchy pop/rock number and one of the strongest non-singles on the album. A duet of sorts thanks to Dave's vocals on the chorus, the song is one of the album's more electronic-sounding tracks thanks to the programmed drums, squiggles of synths and some vocal effects. Throw in some bells on the chorus and it's almost a teaser for where they'd head on next album *Savage*.

⑤ THE MIRACLE OF LOVE

Another track which leans into Phil Spector's Wall Of Sound, *The Miracle Of Love* is a shimmering ballad with Dave again joining in the vocals of the chorus. Although Annie was drawing from a rough period of her own personal life throughout the record, "When the miracle of love comes your way again" could describe Dave's circumstances as he was preparing to marry Bananarama's Siobhan Fahey the following year. Released as the third single, it stalled at No.23 and was the unlikely choice to close their concerts with Dave recalling that people would be leaving the venues in tears thanks to Annie's emotive performances of the song.

⑥ LET'S GO!

As the title and the exclamation point suggest, the tempo is back up for *Let's Go!* A simple synth-led groove gives way to a catchy chorus which sees Annie vying for the prominence with an infectious sax hook. "Let's Go, I wanna fall in love," she playfully coos before a harmonica and guitar riff reminiscent of Prince's *Kiss* kicks in. Fun but throwaway.

⑦ TAKE YOUR PAIN AWAY

One of the more lacklustre songs on the album. A galloping bass and drums which drive the verses soon becomes plodding and a very slight chorus is saved only by a key change. *Take Your Pain Away* outstays its welcome with the repeated refrain of the title becoming monotonous and not taking the song anywhere.

⑧ A LITTLE OF YOU

Quality control is thankfully back with the wonderfully catchy *A Little Of You* which manages to blend a rhythm track not too dissimilar to Feargal Sharkey's *A Good Heart* which Dave had produced the previous year. It is coupled with a gorgeous multi-layered vocal on the chorus and some wonderful strings courtesy of Michael Kamen.

⑨ IN THIS TOWN

Firmly back in rock mode, *In This Town* is recorded as live with audience cheers and is fuelled by an energy and bluesy arrangement which bears more than a passing resemblance to the previous album's *Would I Lie To You?*. It's also a forerunner to the political leanings explored on later records such as the *Peace* album, demanding "In this town, something's got to change".

⑩ I REMEMBER YOU

Closing the album on a reflective note, *I Remember You* manages to switch from a jazzy opening to a military band march to string-laden crescendo. The track is reminiscent of the sonic soundscapes Annie would explore in more depth throughout her solo work. A sombre closer.

in a band having to play the same style over and over again."

While *Be Yourself Tonight* had taken Eurythmics to its commercial peak, the group's success was in direct contrast with the personal turmoil Lennox was experiencing behind the scenes. Very much the reluctant superstar, the magnitude of their popularity made her very uncomfortable. She resented fame, feeling it had robbed her of her anonymity and privacy and as such felt very isolated.

Whilst seeking existential fulfilment she met and married German Hare Krishna devotee Radha Raman, a disastrous union (she describes it as "a HUGE mistake") which lasted little over a year and whilst going through the divorce she discovered a nodule on her vocal cord. Terrified at the prospect of irreparable damage to her voice, she was given a choice of treatment – surgery which could potentially alter her voice permanently, or complete vocal rest for a few months. Choosing the latter, plans for a tour were shelved, a performance at Live Aid was cancelled and work on a new album was delayed while she recovered.

As the group had always functioned as a singular entity, Annie's recovery time also meant an enforced hiatus from Eurythmics for Dave. Notoriously prolific and based in L.A., he utilised the time off to write and produce for other artists. As well as working on Bob Geldof and Feargal Sharkey's

> "I AM REALLY PLEASED THAT I DIDN'T GET STUCK IN A GENRE IN A BAND HAVING TO PLAY THE SAME STYLE OVER AND OVER AGAIN"
>
> DAVE STEWART

THE VIDEOS

WHEN TOMORROW COMES

Given the song's energy and the fact that *When Tomorrow Comes* is the lead single from a new album, the video is strangely subdued and lacks energy. Set in what resembles an empty warehouse, a close-up of each new member of the group serves as an introduction before the band, all dressed in uniform black, give a straightforward performance, the only notable thing bizarrely being a crumpled white sheet at Annie's feet. Whether a time or budget issue, or a creative choice, the video is a disappointment for a band renowned for its ground-breaking visuals.

THORN IN MY SIDE

Thorn In My Side is the previous video done right. Again, it is based around a simple performance and they are once again wearing their leather trousers and coats, but the addition of an audience of sorts – a group of Hell's Angels (they are rockers now don't you know!) and a gaggle of models elevate it significantly. The vivid blue backdrop accentuates Annie's eyes that never falter from the steely gaze she holds with the camera throughout the entire song to emphasize its meaning. As the video draws to a close we even get some visual effects of flames and falling rose petals (thorn-geddit?!).

THE MIRACLE OF LOVE

Directed by Dave Stewart, *The Miracle Of Love* is another lo-fi, low-budget affair focusing on extreme close-ups of Annie's face while singing the song with the colour scheme switching between grainy sepia, black and white and green hues. The performance footage is interspersed with black and white news footage of war, bombings and protests throughout history with grainy, slightly out of focus video of water and burning candles to presumably add texture. The *Revenge* era was not the strongest for Eurythmics in terms of visuals.

MISSIONARY MAN

Aka the one which got all the budget! Following a string of disappointing videos, Willy Smax, who had directed the video for *It's Alright (Baby's Coming Back)* returned for an off-the-wall clip which paired eccentric set-ups (Dave as a mad professor in his lab with snakes) with arresting images of Annie. Looking impossibly glamorous in a black leather catsuit, she prowls the set like an automaton, while close-ups with steel rods piercing her cheeks are a hybrid of Peter Gabriel's *Sledgehammer* video and Debbie Harry's *Koo Koo* LP cover. Finally, a video that sits alongside their classics.

debut solo albums, he also co-wrote *Is This Love?* with Alison Moyet (under the pseudonym of Jean Guiot) and worked with Daryl Hall, Mick Jagger and Tom Petty & The Heartbreakers. As Annie began to take tentative steps back to work, sessions for the Eurythmics fifth album were scheduled around his other commitments.

Taking place Grande Armée Studio in Paris and Conny Plank's Cologne studio, the *Revenge* sessions followed the same structure as previous albums. By this point they had a decade of experience behind them and had developed a shorthand which meant they could produce results quickly. "We wouldn't let anybody else in the room or near us," Dave told *American Songwriter* of their process. "We'd write a song very quickly, sometimes in 20 minutes, then go back in to the engineer and say, 'Alright, we want to record this now,' and he would go, 'Right, when did you write that?!'"

Like much of the duo's oeuvre, the record continued exploration themes of love, loss, mental anguish, frustration and resilience. "Those songs were a sort of exorcism for a lot of my unhappiness," Annie told the BBC's *Omnibus*. "Because I was a very very dark soul and I couldn't come to terms with things. My way of dealing with that was to write it all down. The polarisations of things that were going on, like the extremes of being immensely happy and looking towards the beauty in life and knowing that underneath it all was a tragic undercurrent that was bringing me down – they were soundbites of intense feelings."

An intensely private person – most of the press interviews on the duo from that time mention how difficult it was to gleam anything from Annie in interviews regarding her personal life, lyrics such as "Thorn in my side, you know that's all you ever were" and "Last time you're gonna let me down, last time you're gonna fool around with me" make her feelings at the time abundantly clear.

Though lyrically consistent with their previous work, *Revenge's* biggest change was the introduction of a full live band. If *Be Yourself Tonight* was them dipping their toe into experimenting with a new sound, *Revenge* was them diving in headfirst. Partly inspired by Stewart's relocation to the States and the artists he'd been surrounding himself with and partly inspired by the scope of their success and the size of the venues they'd be performing when they hit the road, they adopted a traditional band line-up (a hark back to their pre-Eurythmics days with The Tourists) to provide a more expansive, robust sound.

IF *BE YOURSELF TONIGHT* WAS THEM DIPPING THEIR TOE INTO EXPERIMENTING WITH A NEW SOUND, *REVENGE* WAS THEM DIVING HEADFIRST

"We'd played in colleges, clubs, small theatres, and Dave was thinking along the lines of: "Well, we're gonna be playing arenas now, what sort of sound would be effective there?" Annie told *Classic Pop* in 2018. "Plus, he's a great guitar player and I think he wanted to play his guitar and that was fine with me. It was like: "Okay, let's do this. Let's be rock! It wasn't pure rock anyway; it was rock with an R&B element."

Blondie's Clem Burke returned to the fray (he previously played on their debut album back in 1981) to play drums, Jimmy "Z" Zavala played saxophone and harmonica, returning keyboard player Patrick Seymour was given a bigger role than he had before and backing vocalist Joniece Jamison was integral to the new sound. A renowned session and touring background singer, Joniece was a support to Annie, ensuring she didn't cause any damage to her voice, particularly her upper register, so soon after her issues with the nodule on her vocal cords. The two developed a strong rapport – particularly in a live setting, as evidenced when the band was officially unveiled at a pair of club gigs in L.A. at The Roxy and Country Club in June 1986. With the band firmly in rehearsal mode for their imminent world tour, the Country Club show was filmed for broadcast on *The Tube* to promote the album. Bob Geldof (who had been working on his debut solo album with Dave at the time) introduced them and Paula Yates interviewed them.

Dave and Annie at the
Poplar Creek Music Theater
in Chicago, April 1986

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On June 30th, 1986 (and two weeks later in the US), *Revenge* was unleashed on the world. Explaining the title to Australian *Smash Hits*, Dave said: "It all goes back to our first album, *In The Garden*. When we made that album, everything you can imagine was stacked against us – from Annie and me splitting up as a couple to people saying we couldn't have a name like Eurythmics, as it was just too complicated and no one would remember it. We were recording in a warehouse, running out of money, and people would come and visit us and say, 'You're mad, completely mad." The whole project seemed destined not to get anywhere. Well, on that album there's a song. *Revenge*, with the line 'Revenge can be so sweet". So, for this album we went back to the same studio, and for one of the tracks – *A Little Of You* – Annie sings again the same line. 'Revenge can be so sweet'. You see, we'd been through all this stuff and come out of it, OK. So, *Revenge* is all to do with that, really."

If the album had been intended as a riposte to their naysayers, Dave and Annie had certainly accomplished what it set out to do. With a stunning painting of the duo from artist Eric Scott adorning the sleeve (the first album since *In The Garden* to include Dave on the front cover), it reached No.3 in the UK and No.12 in the US and contained four hit singles in *When Tomorrow Comes, Thorn In My Side, Missionary Man* and *The Miracle Of Love*. It also saw the duo complete their biggest world tour to date, a nine-month trek across the entire globe which played in stadiums and arenas and was captured for the *Eurythmics Live* home video release.

Revenge was a resounding success by all accounts (with the exception of some mixed reviews) but for those fans that still felt their rocky reinvention strayed too far from the essence of Eurythmics, a return to their synth-pop roots wasn't too far away which would vie for prominence as their true masterpiece.

BANGLES
DIFFERENT LIGHT

CLASSIC ALBUM

THE BANGLES
DIFFERENT LIGHT

WITH A HIT SINGLE PENNED BY PRINCE, ANOTHER THAT GAVE THEM THEIR FIRST US NO.1, AND A SET BRIMMING WITH STYLE AND SASS, THE BANGLES BATTLED SEXISM TO CRASH THE BIG LEAGUE WITH THEIR SOPHOMORE ALBUM

JEREMY ALLEN

For The Bangles, 1986 was the best of times, it was the worst of times. If Charles Dickens' opening line from *A Tale of Two Cities* is applicable then so too is an old aphorism borrowed from *Aesop's Fables*: Be careful what you wish for. Tales of young people dreaming of pop stardom and then achieving fame and fortune only to find it wasn't what they expected are as old as the Hollywood Hills. For The Bangles, what makes this story distinct, is the fact that they were an all-girl group playing their own instruments. If that set-up is unusual almost four decades later, then in 1986 it was practically unheard of, with the world taking a little while to get used to the fact.

Whatever their tribulations, which we'll come to shortly, commercially The Bangles had a year that could be best described as miraculous. Their first single from second album *Different Light* was written by the not-so-mysterious Christopher, aka Prince, the biggest star on the planet at the time, who helped propel them into the big league. *Manic Monday* was only kept off the top spot of the Billboard by

> THE FIRST SINGLE FROM *DIFFERENT LIGHT* WAS WRITTEN BY THE NOT-SO-MYSTERIOUS CHRISTOPHER, AKA PRINCE, WHO HELPED PROPEL THEM INTO THE BIG LEAGUE

Prince himself, with *Kiss*. His impudent song about wanting to stay in bed bonking instead of working for the man was allegedly written primarily for singer Susanna Hoffs, when he saw the video for the group's 1984 track *Hero Takes A Fall* on MTV. Hoffs brings the required mischief to the song.

Follow-up single *If She Knew What She Wants* faltered commercially on account of it being perhaps a little too musically sophisticated (if grammatically awkward), a Lennon and McCartney-like number written by Jules Shear. Any misgivings from Columbia were soon assuaged when the label took a punt on a third single, *Walk Like An Egyptian*. Something of an oddity that sounds like nothing else, it was written by Liam Sternberg. Turned down by Toni Basil of *Hey Mickey* fame, initially, it was brought to The Bangles who reluctantly agreed to give it a go.

Walk Like An Egyptian, despite not really featuring a proper chorus, has an infectious rhythm track that's helped along by drawn out gongs and guitar drones delivered on the one of each bar. The lyrics skip along expeditiously on the offbeat, while a forceful "whoa aye oh!" backing anchors everything to the groove. The interplay between three of the Bangles, taking lead on three different verses, seemed to capture the public's imagination, as did the sand dance that was marketed as a very meta all-new dance craze, featuring everyone from medics in New York City to Egyptian authoritarian dictator Colonel Muammar Gaddafi and Princess Diana (the latter two with the help of crude, computer-generated graphics).

Released in September '86, *Walk Like An Egyptian* crept stealthily up the Billboard, eventually landing The Bangles their first No.1 in America where it stayed for four weeks. Such was the buzz that it took them over Christmas and New Year and then, even more astonishingly, went on to become the best-selling song in America the following year. What's more, *Different Light*, which had been steadily plummeting, returned to become a fixture in the US Top 10, hanging around the American hit parade for 82 weeks in all.

The band had worked incredibly hard to get to this point, especially the Peterson sisters, Vicky and Debbi, who were both vocalists and played guitar and drums, respectively. The pair had traded under a number of band names down the years including The Colours, Those Girls and The Supersonic Bangs, before settling on The Bangs once Hoffs was in place. Another name amendment was forced on them when a New Jersey band called The Bangs threatened to sue, while one more line-up change brought ex-Runaways founder Michael Steele on board on bass.

The group's 1984 debut album *All Over The Place* sold steadily and afforded the group some starry attention, from the aforementioned Prince as well as Cyndi Lauper, who took them on tour and became one of their biggest advocates. Moreover, a young Courtney Love was falling for their 1960s-influenced West Coast sound, which evoked The Byrds and The Mamas and the Papas. Their avowed devotion to The Beatles undoubtedly suffused the record too, a fandom and a preoccupation that was less to be taken for granted back in the mid-1980s.

© Getty

THE SONGS ▶▶

❶ MANIC MONDAY
Take the Boomtown Rats' *I Don't Like Mondays* and simmer down the melodrama, throw in the verse from Prince's *1999* and add some Californian sunshine and fruity lyrics and you get *Manic Monday*, The Bangles' memorable breakthrough hit.

❷ IN A DIFFERENT LIGHT
Coming straight in with the catchy chorus of the near title track, it's a song that doesn't hang about with its punches. Written by Susanna Hoffs and Vicki Peterson and sung by the latter, it turned out to be a nice little earner as the B-side to *Manic Monday*.

❸ WALKING DOWN YOUR STREET
The fourth single from *Different Light* was written by Hoffs and Louis Gutierrez, owing more than a debt to The Velvelettes' *Really Sayin' Something*.

❹ WALK LIKE AN EGYPTIAN
An astronomical success, *Walk Like An Egyptian* was a quirky single that erred into novelty and yet was somehow saved by how cool the finished article was, instigating something approximating Banglemania in 1986 and '87.

❺ STANDING IN THE HALLWAY
A bluesy pop song that is more dated by the session players David Kahne brought in than the inevitable 80s sheen the producer sprinkled into the mix.

❻ RETURN POST
Another written by Vicky Peterson and Hoffs, you suspect the origins of this song date back to Peterson's earlier, more guitar-based incarnation of the band. *Return Post* is certainly a throwback to *All Over The Place*.

❼ IF SHE KNEW WHAT SHE WANTS
The album's second single didn't pack the instantaneousness of its predecessor or its successor, but *If She Knew What She Wants* was a gorgeous demonstration of The Bangles' dynamic nevertheless.

❽ LET IT GO
Vocally a group effort that demonstrates a tight harmonic unit, somewhere between the Mamas And The Papas' *California Dreamin'* and The 5th Dimension's *Up, Up and Away*.

❾ SEPTEMBER GURLS
Michael Steele's soulful reading of the Alex Chilton classic is a surprise standout on *Different Light*, and may well have been a secret influence on The Lemonheads' Evan Dando.

❿ ANGELS DON'T FALL IN LOVE
More from Hoffs and Vicky Peterson with the latter taking lead vocals, this rattles along without ever quite peaking, though Peterson sounds magnificent when unleashing vibrato near the top of her range.

⓫ FOLLOWING
A rare showing of vulnerability on *Different Light* adds a different nuance altogether, brought via bass player/vocalist Michael Steele, who wears her proverbial heart on her sleeve on *Following*.

⓬ NOT LIKE YOU
One of the rare lead tracks sung by drummer Debbi Peterson on *Different Light*, it's a forgettable denouement.

THE VIDEOS ▶▶

MANIC MONDAY
Directed by Leslie Libman, the promo for *Manic Monday* cuts between black and white and colour and a wide range of lenses and angles, interspersed with clocks and calendars and various scenes shot in the city to illustrate the divergent benefits of work and play. The video ended up on constant rotation on MTV, quickly establishing the band as a source of endless fascination for the public as well as the tabloids.

IF SHE KNEW WHAT SHE WANTS
For whatever reason, *If She Knew What She Wants* appears to have two official videos, one for the UK and Europe featuring a Wurlitzer jukebox and a revolving stage in what appears to be a cafe scenario, while the US version also utilised a revolving stage but this time on a darkened stage. Reasons why there had to be two versions have no doubt been lost to the mists of time.

WALK LIKE AN EGYPTIAN
A live performance intercut with various people known and unknown walking like Egyptians around NYC and in deserts – i.e. doing the sand dance – animated for the more famous cameos, including Col. Gaddafi, and the Princess of Wales. Directed by Chad Hicks and Keith Oliver, makers of animated sitcom *Total Drama*, it imbues us with the sense that the world is walking like an Egyptian.

WALKING DOWN YOUR STREET
The fourth single packed some pazzazz with a story about a fictional band called The Love Beats, played by The Bangles. The band win a competition to open as support for Little Richard, who appears ina gold lame jacket with a brief speaking part, while actor Randy Quaid drives the groupto their show in a beat up pickup. Richard was apparently bribed with the promise he could keep the jacket.

There was an edge to that debut that was infused with some of the rawness of 60s garage bands. Produced by David Kahne, it was a debut that won them admirers in high places, though for The Bangles themselves, it was never raw enough, more capturing the dead air of the studio than the live electric vibe that they recognised themselves by. The group had more than just misgivings about that first time working with Kahne, which would turn into a full blown nightmare when the label insisted he should take the helm again for *Different Light*.

The Bangles came to resent Kahne's divide and rule tactics, particularly the Petersons, who suspected the producer favoured Hoffs over them. A group founded on egalitarian principles, where everyone was a singer, would struggle to maintain that noble attempt to share the limelight as Hoffs was seemingly thrust to the foreground. Anger spilled over when the de facto lead singer posed alone for the cover of *Spin*'s inaugural swimsuit edition the following year.

Infuriatingly for the band, they would continually be compared to Los Angeles counterparts The Go-Gos, merely for sharing the same sex and geography. Moreover, at a time when manufactured pop groups were sometimes looked down upon, being considered good musicians – which they undoubtedly were – was important to the band. Kahne would refuse input from the musicians in the band, brought in session players to re-record their parts, and reportedly ridiculed Debbi Peterson – so much so that she lost all confidence in her singing and playing abilities, admitting to suicidal thoughts and feelings in Jennifer Otter Bickerdike's *Eternal Flame* biography from earlier this year. And that's not all: apparently Kahne had a habit of inserting himself into the songwriting credits.

The Bangles also felt let down by the label when the only songs chosen for singles were written by other artists. That was finally remedied once *Walk Like An Egyptian* had established them as serious recording artists with heft – the Motown-inspired *Walking Down Your Street*, a song penned by Hoffs and Vicky Peterson, was released as fourth single, reaching a more than respectable No.11 on the Billboard charts.

If *Different Light* was the most fraught album The Bangles ever made, then it certainly didn't hurt it commercially. It is estimated to have sold more than three and a half million copies, and made each of its musicians household names, even if that attention wasn't always equal. Hoffs, it's fair to say, became a superstar out of the deal and the cynosure of the band.

AS PAINFUL AS THE RECORD MIGHT HAVE BEEN TO MAKE, *DIFFERENT LIGHT* HAS SECURED THE GROUP'S LEGACY, WITH THE BANGLES ONE OF MOST SUCCESSFUL FEMALE BANDS OF ALL TIME

Her upbringing as the daughter of a doctor and a film director and producer in her mother, Tamar Simon Hoffs, was seen by some to give her an advantage when it came to working with artists who'd further her career, or even in working the camera (her almond eyes moving from side to side during the *Walk Like An Egyptian* video is often cited). It's true, Hoffs was a nepo baby from a privileged upbringing in bohemian Pacific Palisades who grew up watching French New Wave movies and came to regard neighbour Leonard Nimoy as a kindly uncle, though you suspect Hoffs' talent and that voice – which at times channels the emotional resonance of Dolly Parton – would have won through anyway.

Arguably, the most interesting character of all in The Bangles was Michael Steele, who grew up as Susan Thomas in an affluent Los Angeles household but turned her back on Pasadena high society in favour of joining Kim Foley's The Runaways in the mid-70s. Steele was the last to join the definitive line-up of The Bangles, a brooding presence whose two main solo vocal contributions to *Different Light* were a cover of Big Star's *September Gurls* and a self-penned, Dylan-inspired acoustic number *Following*, bringing a melancholy depth to the album that feels slightly out of step with what was popular in 1986 (aside, perhaps, from other Paisley Underground acolytes such as Rain Parade and the Three O'Clock). Ever the enigma, Steele went into retirement after the reformed group's promotional tour for *Doll Revolution* ended in 2005, and was nowhere to be seen when the group got back together in 2018 for a series of dates.

As painful as the record might have been to make, *Different Light* has secured the group's legacy, with The Bangles undoubtedly one of the greatest and most successful female bands of all time, inspiring the generations that have followed, perhaps making life marginally easier for everyone from Veruca Salt to Haim to Savages. What's more, they leave a bunch of great songs, whether covers, interpretations or self-penned moments of magic. ■

The Bangles' breakthrough long-player, *Different Light* made UK No.3 and US No.2

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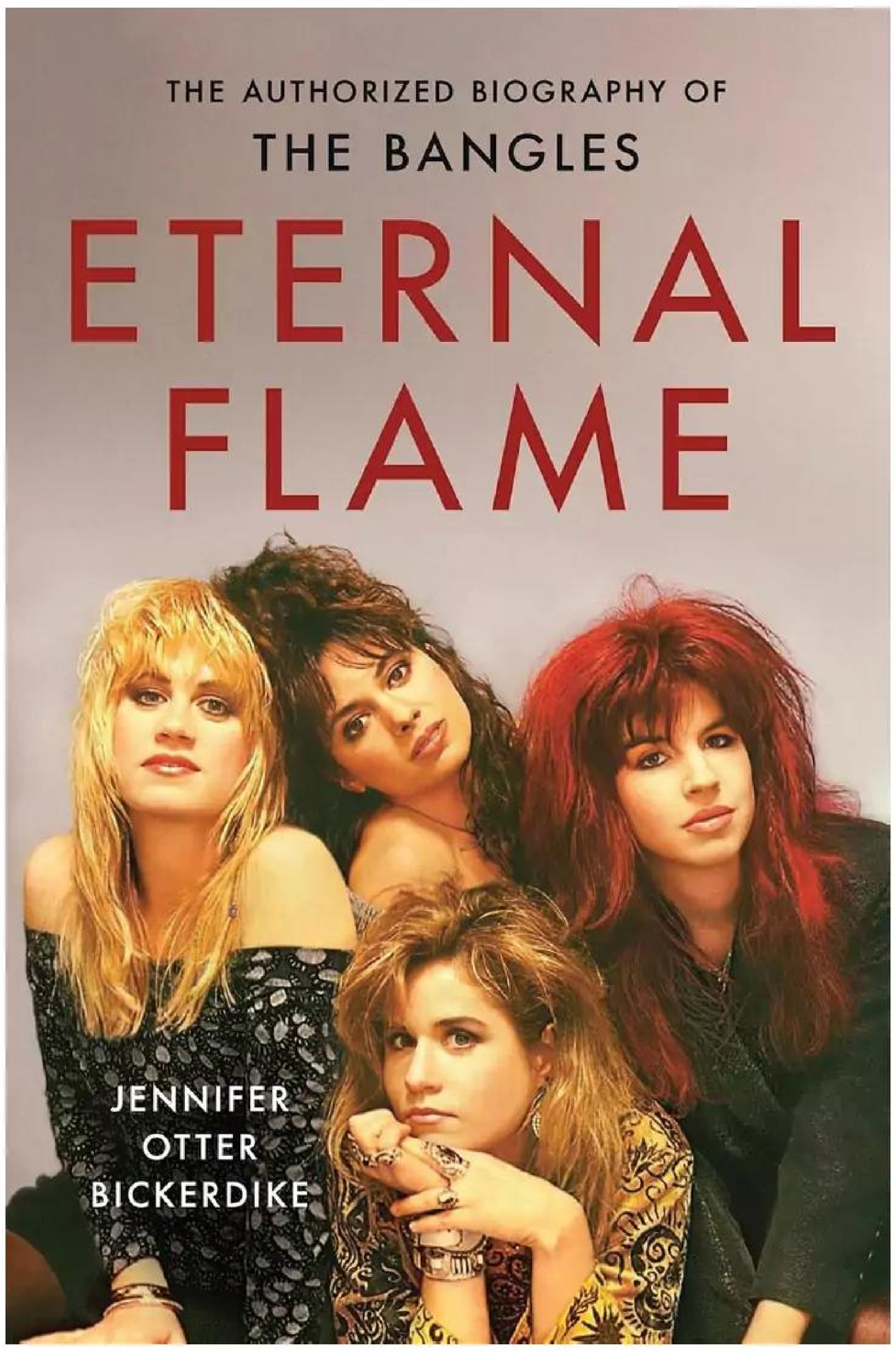


Jennifer's biography is available now via Da Capo Press

***Eternal Flame* tells the story of the band's journey from Los Angeles cool to worldwide fame**

Q+A

JENNIFER OTTER BICKERDIKE

ACADEMIC, WRITER AND HISTORIAN JENNIFER OTTER BICKERDIKE IS THE AUTHOR BEHIND NEW BIOGRAPHY *ETERNAL FLAME: THE AUTHORIZED BIOGRAPHY OF THE BANGLES. CLASSIC POP* CHATS TO HER ABOUT ONE OF OUR ALBUMS OF 1986.

RIK FLYNN

What led you to wanting to write a book about The Bangles?
I have been a fan of the group since first seeing them on *Friday Night Videos* when I was a child. They were beacons of possibility of what a woman could do and be. To have the chance to unpack their story and get to know them as humans has been one of the biggest honours of my life.

What is the most surprising thing you learned about them?
The most surprising thing I learned while doing the book is how little things have changed. We live in a moment where this is the appearance and lip service given to women being equal, but underneath that lurks a deep and poisonous misogyny.

As a youngster in the UK watching *Top Of The Pops*, I just saw a cool band, but as an all-female group in a male-dominated industry, how hard do you think it was for them to break through and be taken seriously?
Extremely difficult. Even people at their own record label belittled and doubted their abilities. It is shameful. That they endured and pressed on is a testament to their work ethic and belief in what they were doing.

Who or what do you think got them through all of that?
The desire to be artists and create.

You go in depth in the book on *Different Light*. What about that album was so decisive and pivotal in terms of their sound?
It captured their unique style along with the zeitgeist of keyboards, along with seeing them pair up with some of the most talented

©Getty

songwriters of the time – though they truly did not need it, as songwriting is what got them signed in the first place.

Why do you think those outside songwriters were brought in in the first place?
The band was not given any time to work on new material between years of touring to promote *All Over The Place* and record *Different Light*. They were seen as a product on a conveyer belt, not as humans, and certainly not as artists. They did not have a choice as the outsiders were chosen and brought in by the record label.

You cover inter-band tensions in the book too. It's obviously the norm for all bands, but did you get a sense that it was *Manic Monday* that had the biggest effect on their dynamic, Prince being so Susanna-obsessed? If not what caused the tension?
Being in a band, being together 24/7, having no control over what the label, the press or the fans say or do is stressful for anyone. Bring in the fact that the band were valued most of all for their looks and it's a hideous situation.

***Different Light* was a massive shift in success for the band compared to *All Over The Place*. How much of that was down to the exposure from Prince's involvement in that one song do you think?**
Prince was a great help in upping the stakes and providing visibility.

Do you think they may have found it conflicting to score their first major successes with songs written by other people?
The Bangles were happy to have success, and grateful to be able to work with great songwriters.

When you spoke to each band member, how different were their recollections of the period?
Everyone has their own truth.

What were the main influences on the album itself?
If I had to sum it up, I would say exhaustion.

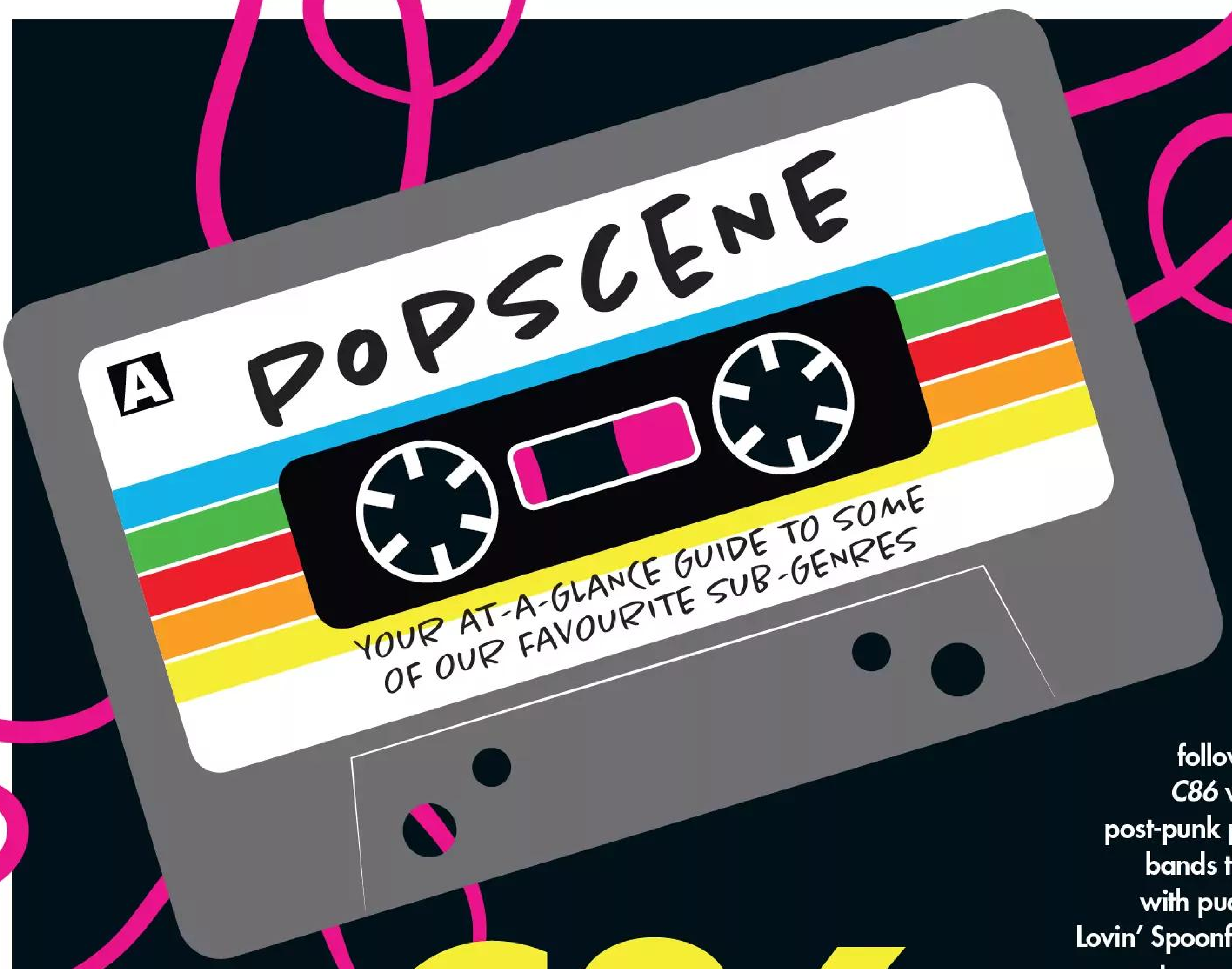
How much do you think they had strayed from their initial ethos when they started?
Never.

With its various wartime bans and its title/lyrics, do you think *Walk Like An Egyptian* is too out of time to be enjoyed in woke 2025?
No.

Am I right that that song didn't help the band tensions either?
The band got a #1 album around the world with the song, which was something they could check off their bucket list. They were thrilled.

***Different Light* was, for me, one of the best albums of the year (and the decade!). Do you think The Bangles deserve a little more kudos in the greater musical world?**
YES!!!!

And finally, what are your favourite moments on the album?
I personally love *Walking Down Your Street*. ■


A
POPSCENE
YOUR AT-A-GLANCE GUIDE TO SOME OF OUR FAVOURITE SUB-GENRES

C86

NAMED FROM A CASSETTE COMPILATION GIVEN AWAY FREE WITH *NME*, *C86* WOULD COME TO DEFINE A VERY SPECIFIC STRAIN OF GUITAR-LED INDIE-POP…

STEVE O'BRIEN

What is it?

Sometimes conflated with soundalike sub-genre 'jangle-pop', *C86* was the term given to a particular brand of introspective, lo-fi, Byrds-influenced indie power-pop. The name derived from a cassette tape given away free with a May 1986 issue of the *NME*. A belated follow-up to their *C81* comp from five years previous, *C86* was somewhat narrower in scope than its eclectic post-punk predecessor, featuring a gaggle of (often Scottish) bands that it was easy to mock as fey twentysomethings with pudding bowl haircuts and paisley shirts strumming Lovin' Spoonful riffs on second-hand Rickenbackers. That said, not every song on the 22-track cassette conformed to that pasty-faced, solipsistic stereotype, with Stump, Bogshed, Big Flame and The Shrubs all sharing a similar political punch. And indie wags Half Man Half Biscuit never quite fitted in with the Beano punk of *I Hate Nerys Hughes (From The Heart)*. Compiled by *NME* staffers Roy Carr, Neil Taylor and Adrian Thrills, *C86* didn't invent that jangly pop sound (if The Smiths had formed just a few years later, they'd have certainly been lumped together with the C86 crowd), but it did give it an easily identifiable tag. That fanzine-fuelled first wave helped define the sound of indie for years to come, influencing such bands as Belle & Sebastian, Franz Ferdinand and The Strokes.

Katrina Mitchell, Aggi Wright and Stephen McRobbie, aka The Pastels

© Getty

What they say

"It's hard to remember how underground guitar music and fanzines were in the mid-80s; DIY ethics and any residual punk attitudes were in isolated pockets around the country and the C86 comp and gigs brought them together in an explosion of new groups." **BOB STANLEY, SAINT ETIENNE**

"Rarely has a compilation of largely unsuccessful groups aroused so much ire." **THE GUARDIAN**

"It was very much a non-London thing. There were scenes outside London, with people who had been exchanging letters and fanzines. People didn't feel the need to go to London to make things happen." **MATT HAYNES, SARAH RECORDS**

"It was the most indie thing to have ever existed." **ANDREW COLLINS**

"The political aspect has been neglected. It was very, very open to women. Although it wasn't overtly political, women felt involved because musicianship wasn't at a premium." **AMELIA FLETCHER CBE, TALULAH GOSH**

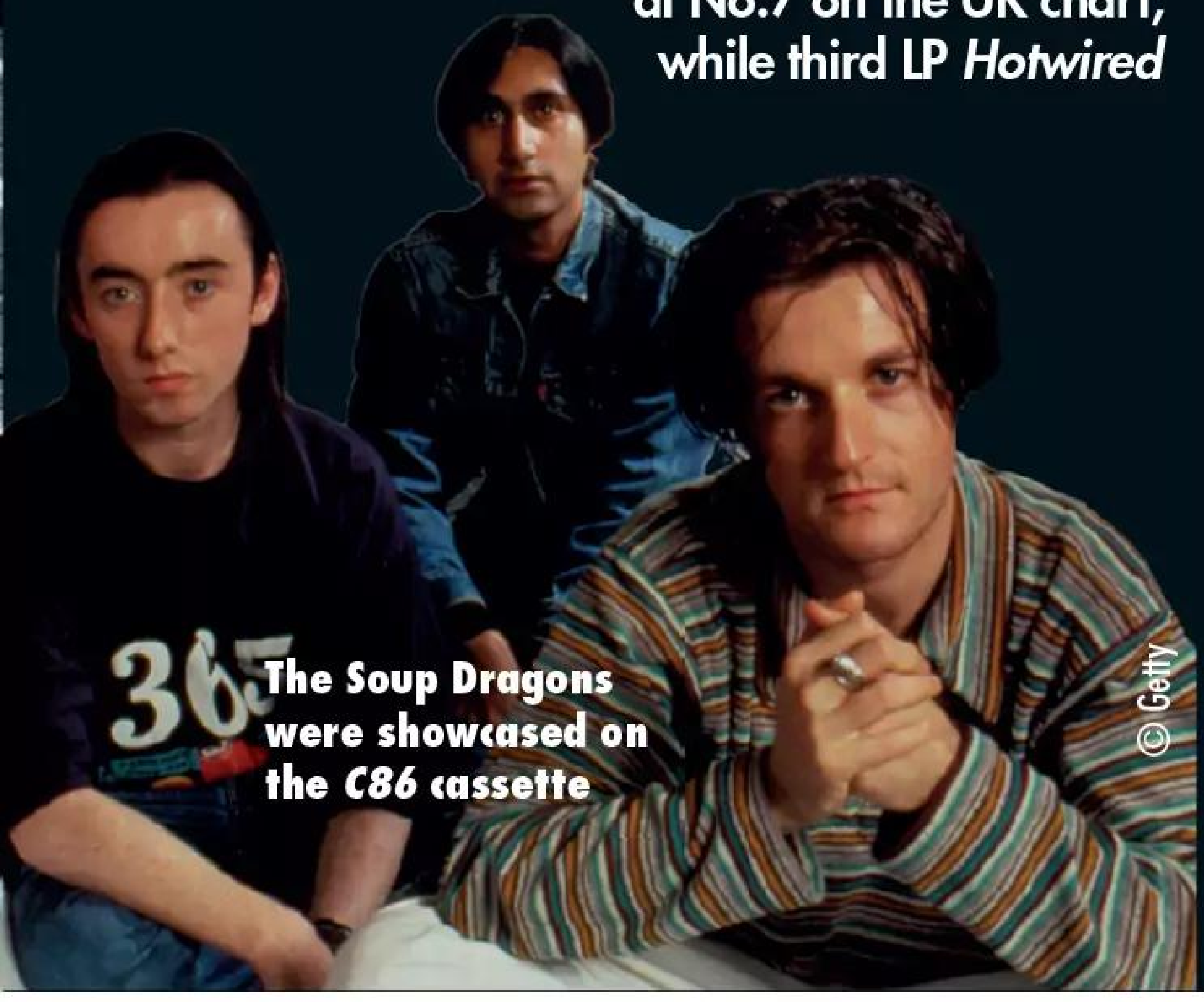
Essential Artists

◀ THE PASTELS

Formed in 1981 on the fringes of Glasgow's so-indie-it-hurts Postcard Records scene, The Pastels dropped their first long-player, *Up For A Bit With The Pastels*, in 1987. Though feted by names such as The Jesus And Mary Chain, Sonic Youth and – later on – Kurt Cobain, it failed to chart. Second album *Sittin' Pretty* (1989) performed similarly dismally, though one song, *Nothing To Be Done*, was later showcased on the soundtrack of 1998's film adaptation of Irvine Welsh's *The Acid House*. A new line-up, assembled around vocalist Stephen McRobbie and keyboard player Annabel 'Aggi' Wright and featuring Teenage Fanclub's Norman Blake and Gerard Love, formed in the 1990s releasing the *Mobile Safari* LP at the height of Britpop. Their last album, *Slow Summits*, arrived in 2013.

▼ THE SOUP DRAGONS

Most famous for their Junior Reid-assisted cover of The Rolling Stones' *I'm Free*, which netted them a Top 5 hit in 1990, The Soup Dragons were formed in 1985, dropping their debut EP, *The Sun Is In The Sky*, a year later. Following the release of their first LP, 1988's *This Is Our Art*, they lost their drummer and so began experimenting with drum machines and samplers, leading to a more indie-dance sound. Second album *Lovegod* would peak at No.7 on the UK chart, while third LP *Hotwired* would net them their biggest US hit, with *Divine Thing* reaching No.26 on the Billboard Main Rock chart. By fourth album, *Hydrophonic* (1994), only vocalist Sean Dickson remained as the sole original member, though the record boasts contributions from such luminaries as Bootsy Collins, Lynval Golding, Neville Staples and Tina Weymouth.



The Soup Dragons were showcased on the *C86* cassette

© Getty

PRIMAL SCREAM

Though the Scream's early output was absolutely in the *C86* wheelhouse, they soon jettisoned that dreamy-eyed DIY aesthetic for something more tuned to the dancefloor. Third album *Screamadelica* would encapsulate the acid house era, before they flushed the Es down the loo for the rock-fired *Give Out But Don't Give Up*. They have continued to be creatively restless, often sounding like completely different bands between records. Of their last album, *Chaosmosis*, *The Guardian* wrote: "From the gothic guitar and gleaming synths of the pounding *100% Or Nothing* to the barroom piano and 8-bit bleep of *Carnival Of Fools*, *Chaosmosis* is bright, honed and fun."

SHOP ASSISTANTS

Another Scots indie outfit, Shop Assistants were formed in 1984 under the name Buba & The Shop Assistants featuring Aggi Wright (yes, her again) at the mic. When Wright departed for The Pastels, Karen Parker and Alex Taylor took over on vocals and they released their debut EP, *Shopping Parade*, in 1985. Its lead track, *All Day Long*, was described by Morrissey as his favourite single of that year and John Peel also approved (two of their songs made it into consecutive Festive Fiftys). They released their eponymous first album in 1986, peaking at No.100 in the UK. The group disbanded in 1987, though a new line-up formed in 1989, released two singles before splitting for good.

Essential Tracks

VELOCITY GIRL – PRIMAL SCREAM

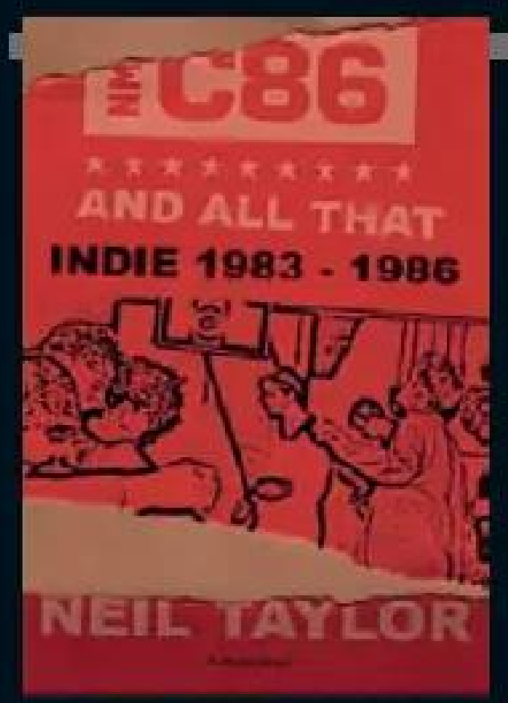
BREAKING LINES – THE PASTELS

IT'S UP TO YOU – SHOP ASSISTANTS

BIG JIM (THERE'S NO PUBS IN HEAVEN) – THE MACKENZIES

PRIMAL SCREAM
the pastels
NME C86
Shop Assistants

Further Reading



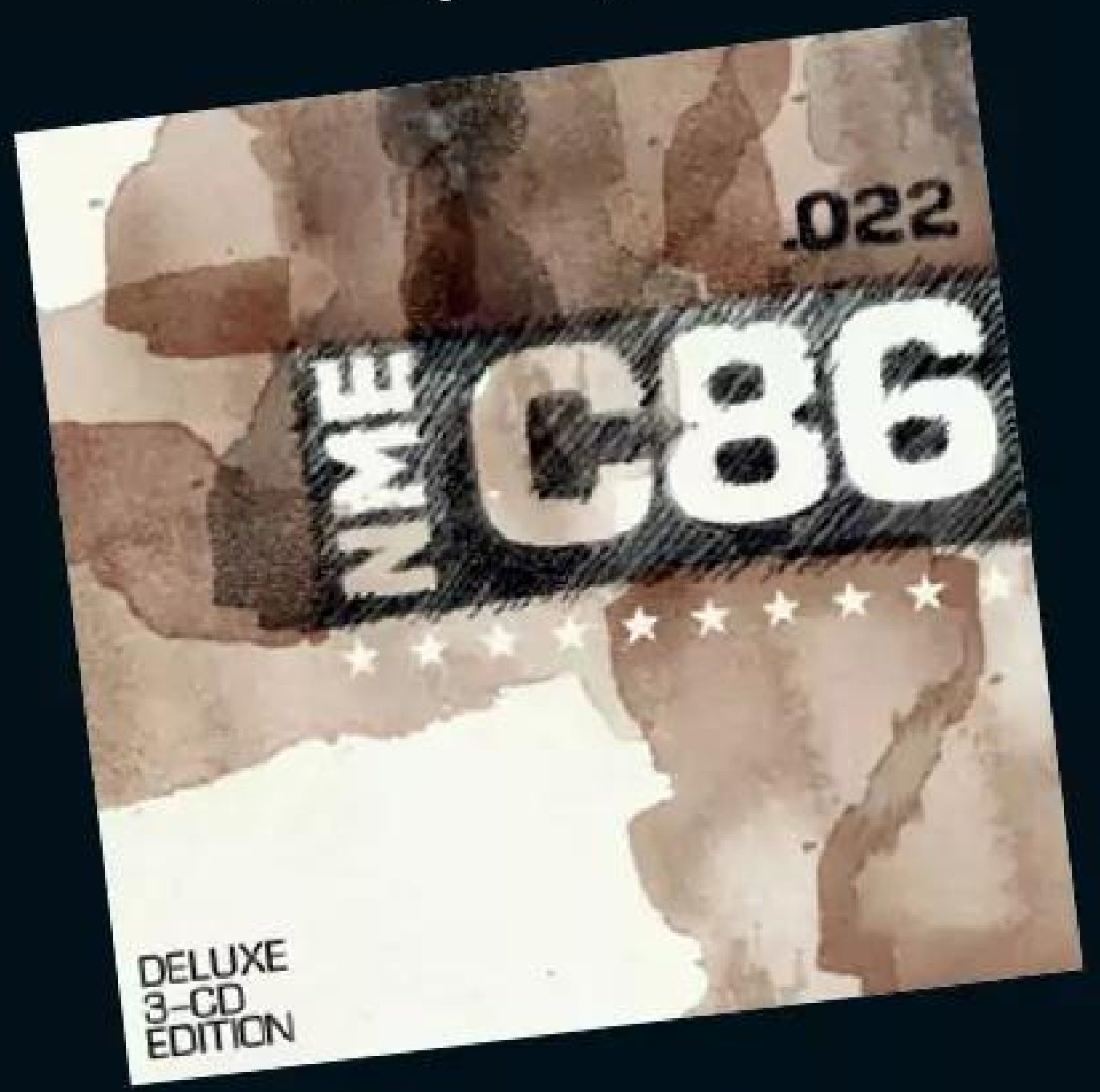
C86 And All That: The Birth Of Indie, 1983-86 by Neil Taylor

Related genres

Shoegazing, Dreampop, Nu Gaze, Jangle-pop, Paisley Underground

Further listening

C86 – The Deluxe Edition (Cherry Red): A 3CD expanded edition of the original cassette, with some 50 extra tracks curated by original co-compiler Neil Taylor ■



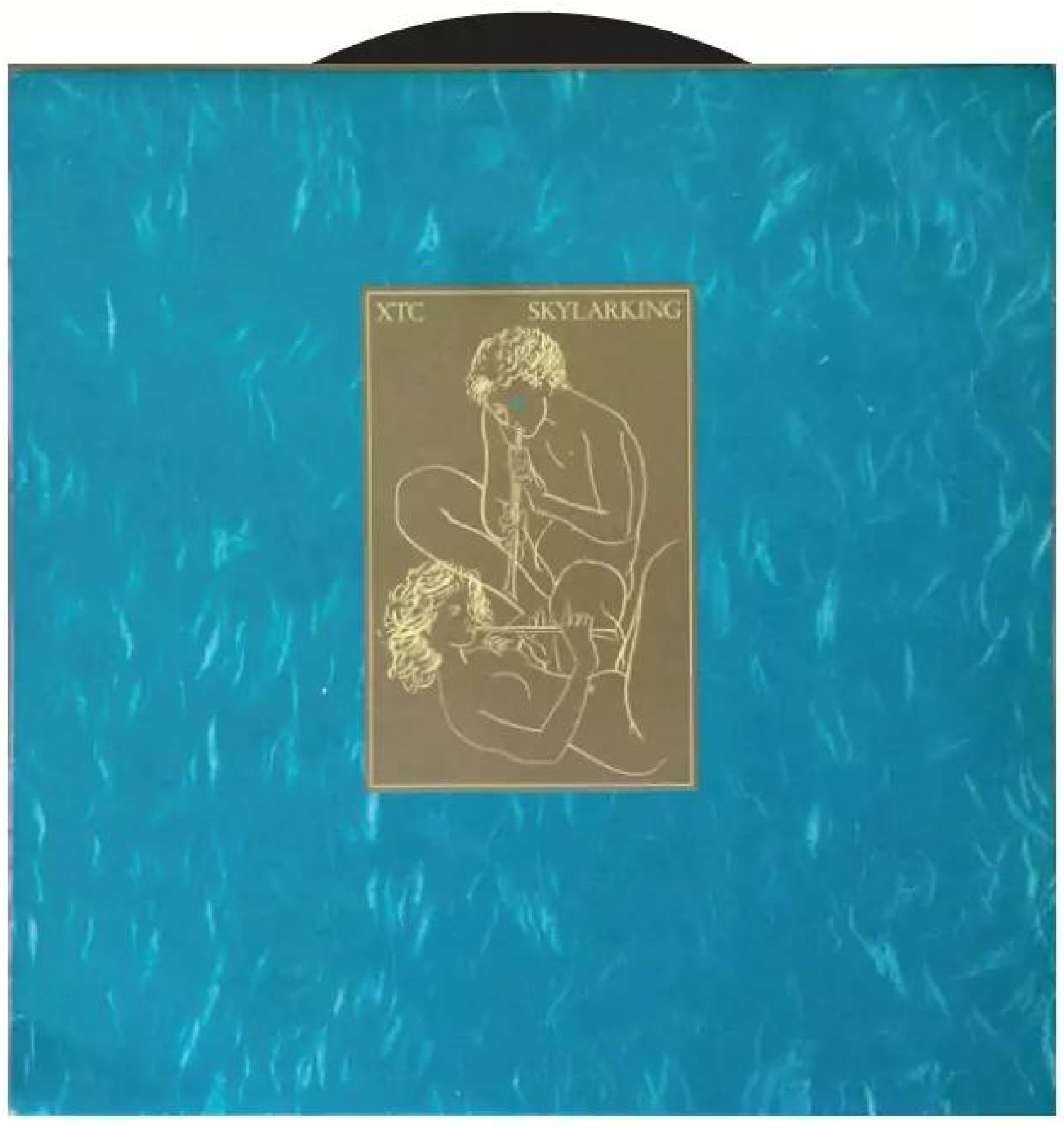
1986

THE **BEST** OF THE REST

YET ANOTHER STANDOUT YEAR IN POP, WITH A SLEW OF VIBRANT RECORDS THAT STRETCHED ACROSS THE GENRES, FROM SYNTH-POP AND JANGLING GUITARS ON TO GOTH AND CHART-READY HIP-HOP. HERE'S OUR SELECTION OF 1986's OTHER BIG CONTENDERS…

ALISTAIR POWELL

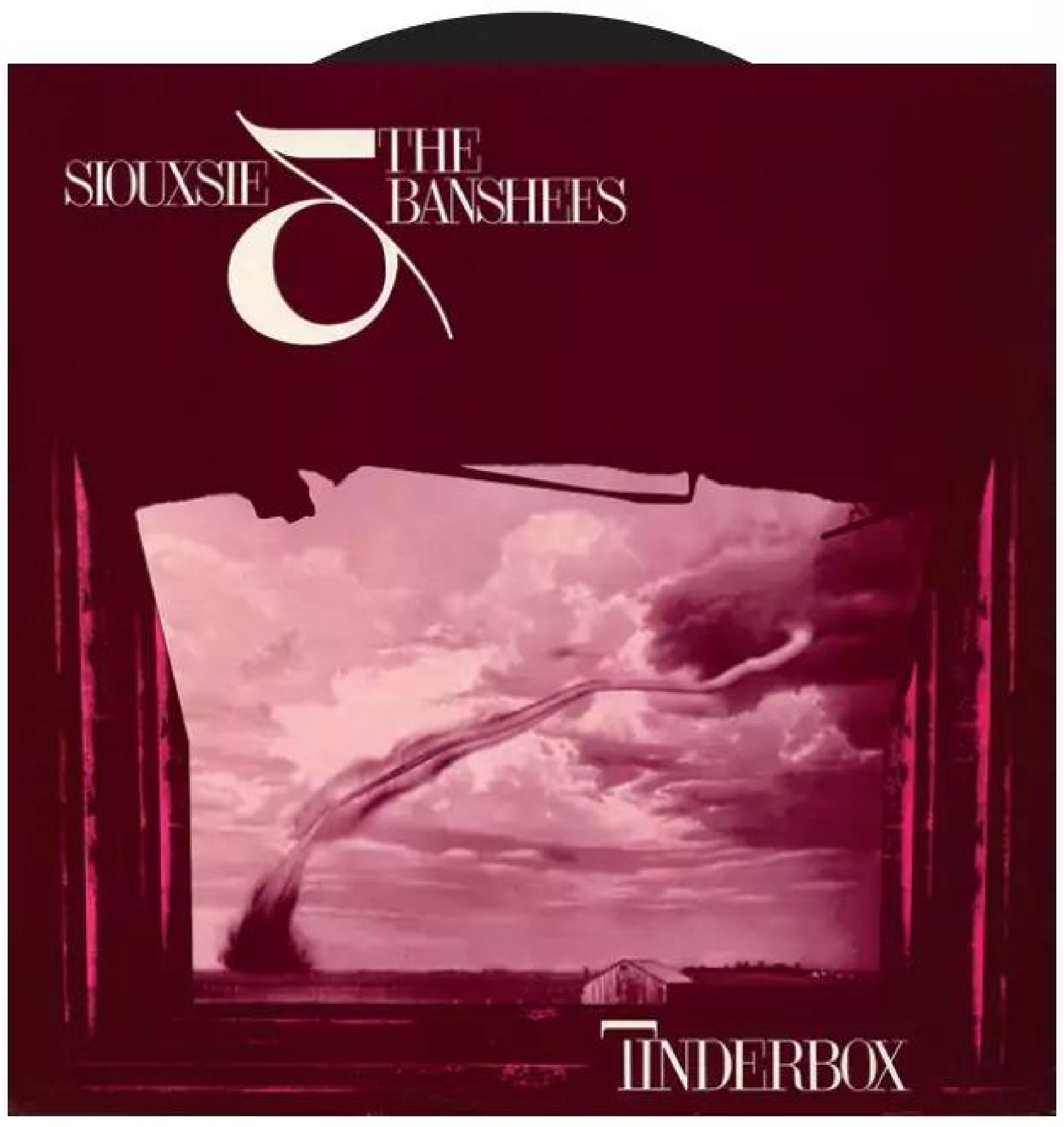
© Getty



SKYLARKING

XTC

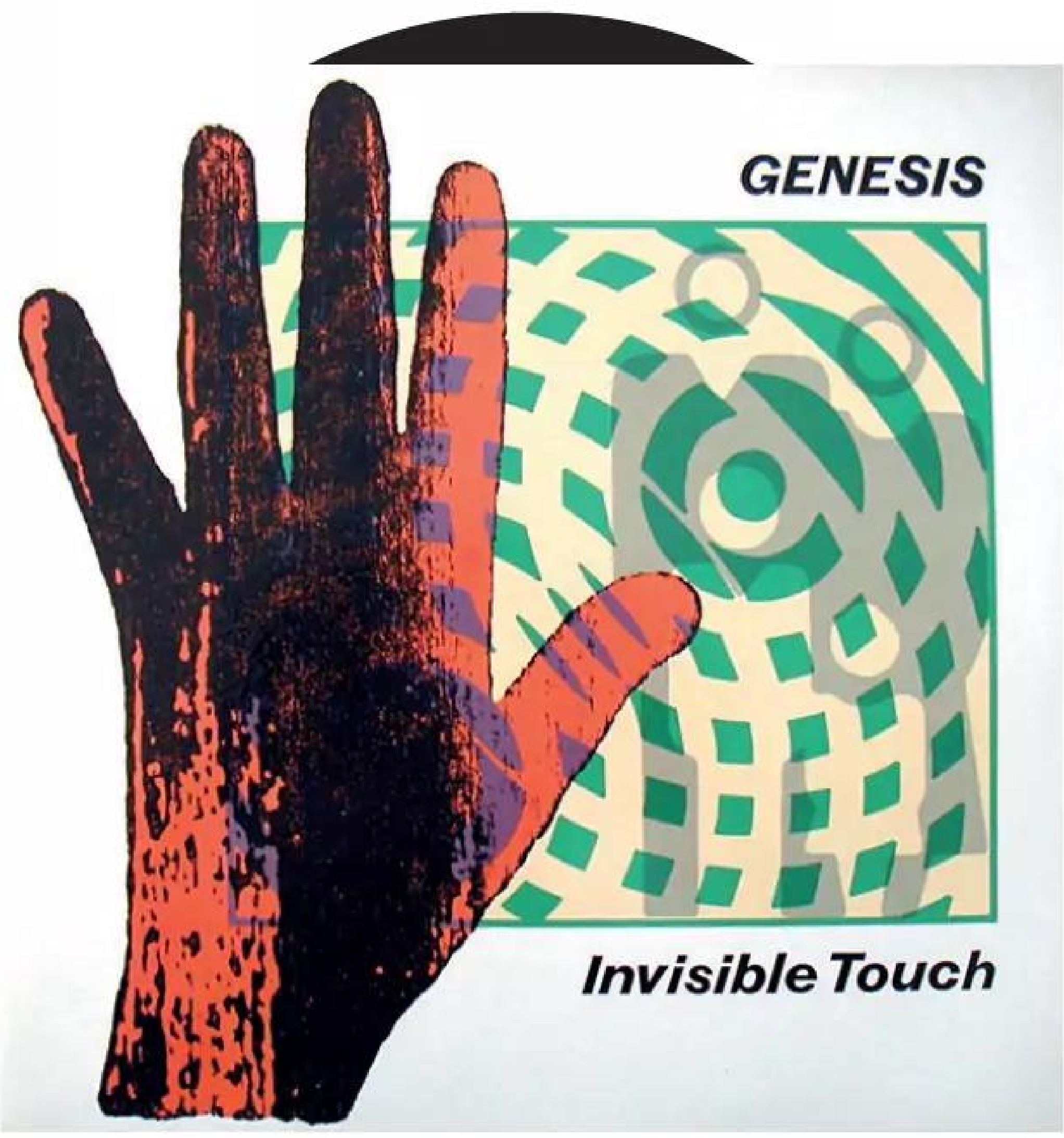
UK cult favourites XTC's eighth album was an attempt to open up the States, with Virgin Records enlisting American producer Todd Rundgren to make it happen. *Skylarking* was built on a concept devised by Rundgren, utilising cycles of life and death, all things pastoral and a "playfully sexual hot summer" – as Andy Partridge expanded – as its core. Despite studio wranglings, the end product is a masterpiece of graceful 60s-inspired psych-pop and ruminative wordplay. As for that Stateside glory, the LP eventually only managed No.70, once the impious *Dear God* – initially left off the record but given some college radio love – was added to a reissue. Its original sleeve was rejected – pubic hair entwined with daisies – replaced with a Hans Erni painting.



TINDERBOX

SIOUXSIE & THE BANSHEES

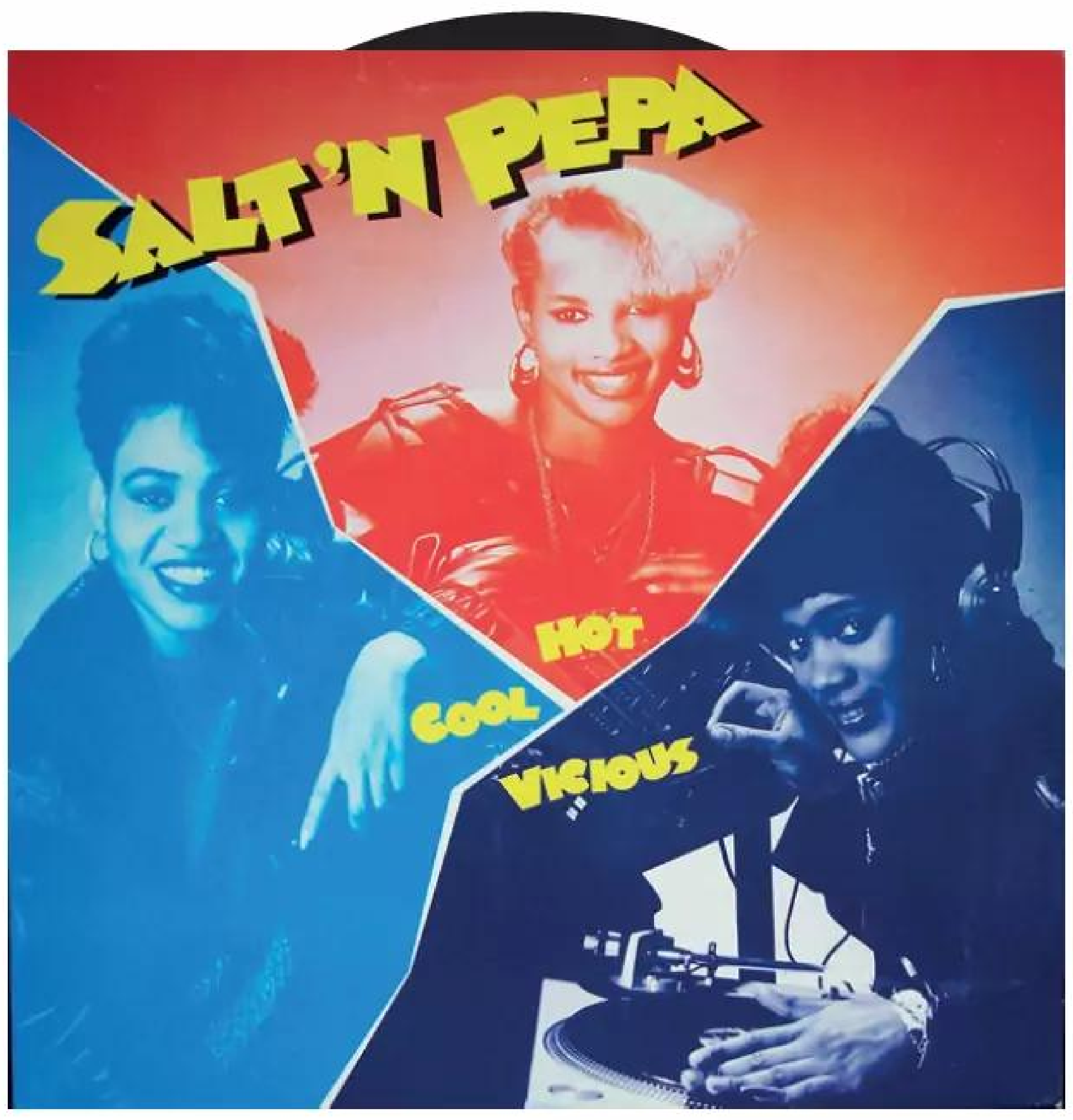
With Robert Smith departed, Siouxsie and co. introduced their new recruit, ex-Clock DVA guitarist John Valentine Carruthers, via an utterly bewitching collection strengthened by the fact that it was written specifically to be played live. Began at the storied Hansa by the Wall studio in Berlin in May 1985 and wrapped up in the UK, this Hugh Jones-produced jewel finds Sioux's potent verse delivered in formidable voice, gelling beautifully with Steve Severin's inventive bass lines, Budgie's propulsive rhythms and Carruthers' imaginative fretwork. Pulsing, shimmering effects-heavy arrangements abound with highlights including the filmic *Candyman,* Pompeii-inspired *Cities In Dust* and glistening *Cannons.* Going down a storm, it made No.13.



INVISIBLE TOUCH

GENESIS

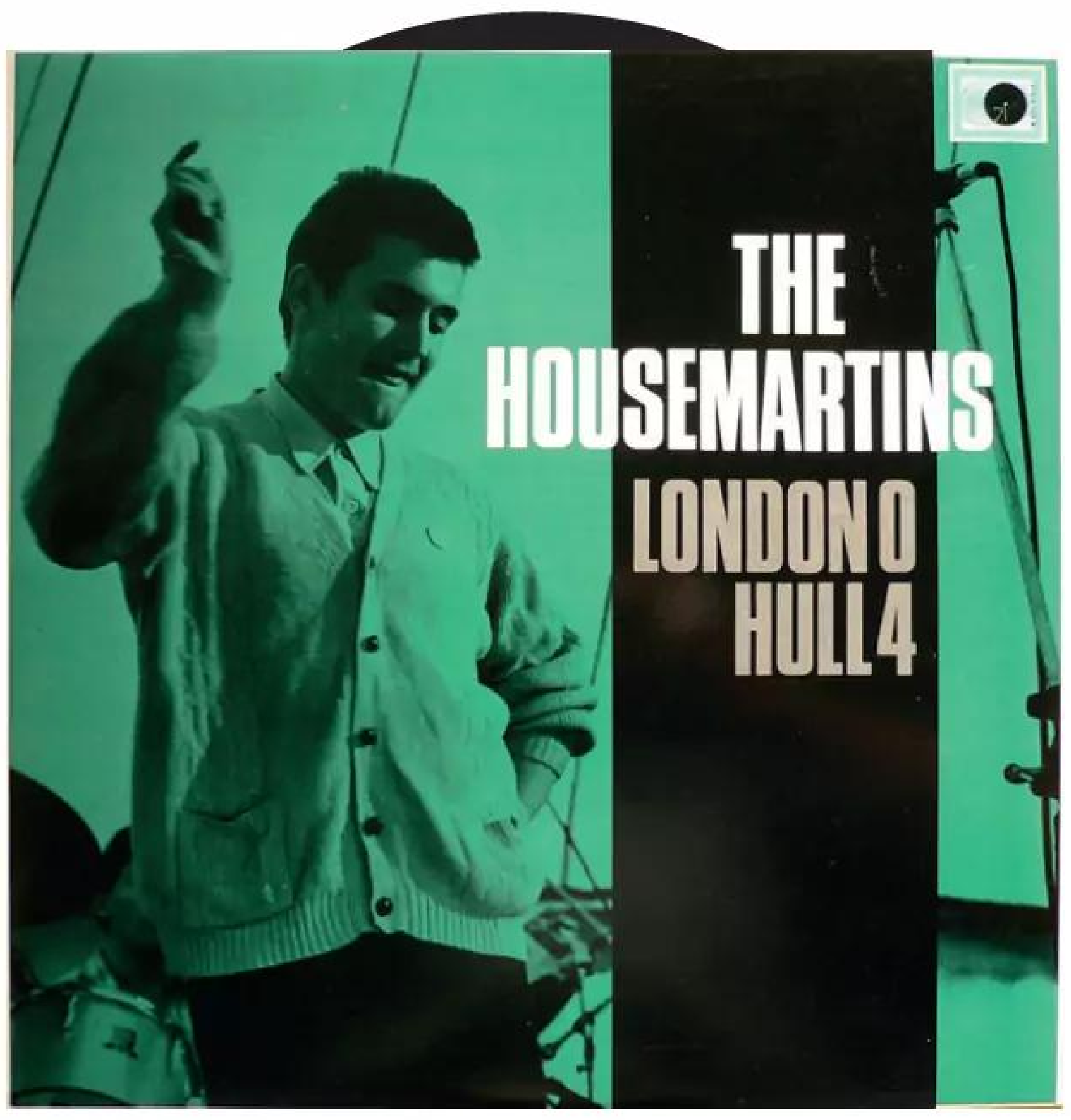
Album number 13 was in no way unlucky for Phil Collins et al. In fact, Genesis' 1986 classic LP topped the charts in the UK, just missed in the US at No.3, and was an absolutely mammoth hit in numerous other territories, becoming the group's biggest-selling coillection. Produced by Hugh Padgham and laid down at Genesis' own Surrey studio, The Farm, the band began with no pre-written material at all and instead improvised songs and ideas on the fly in sessions that spanned day and night. What slowly emerged was a glossy, commercial affair, and tracks such as the title track (their only No.1 single), *Land Of Confusion* and *Tonight, Tonight, Tonight* have become classics in their catalogue.



HOT, COOL & VICIOUS

SALT-N-PEPA

The ground-shaking debut long-player from Big Apple trio, Salt (Cheryl James), Pepa (Sandra Denton) and DJ Spinderella (Deidra Roper), arrived at the close of the year on Next Plateau Records and ensured many-a Yuletide croon was removed from the turntable, replaced by fresh New York hip-hop. Fashioned by one of the very first major female rap acts, *Hot, Cool & Vicious* is a show of glowing confidence, bristling energy and a welcome punch of party-primed sass. Opening track *Push It* was, of course, the record's huge hit, making UK No.2, piercing the Billboard Top 20 and bagging a Grammy nomination, no less, while the album itself gets serious kudos for becoming the first rap album by a female act to attain both gold and platinum status over in the States. Push it real good, indeed.



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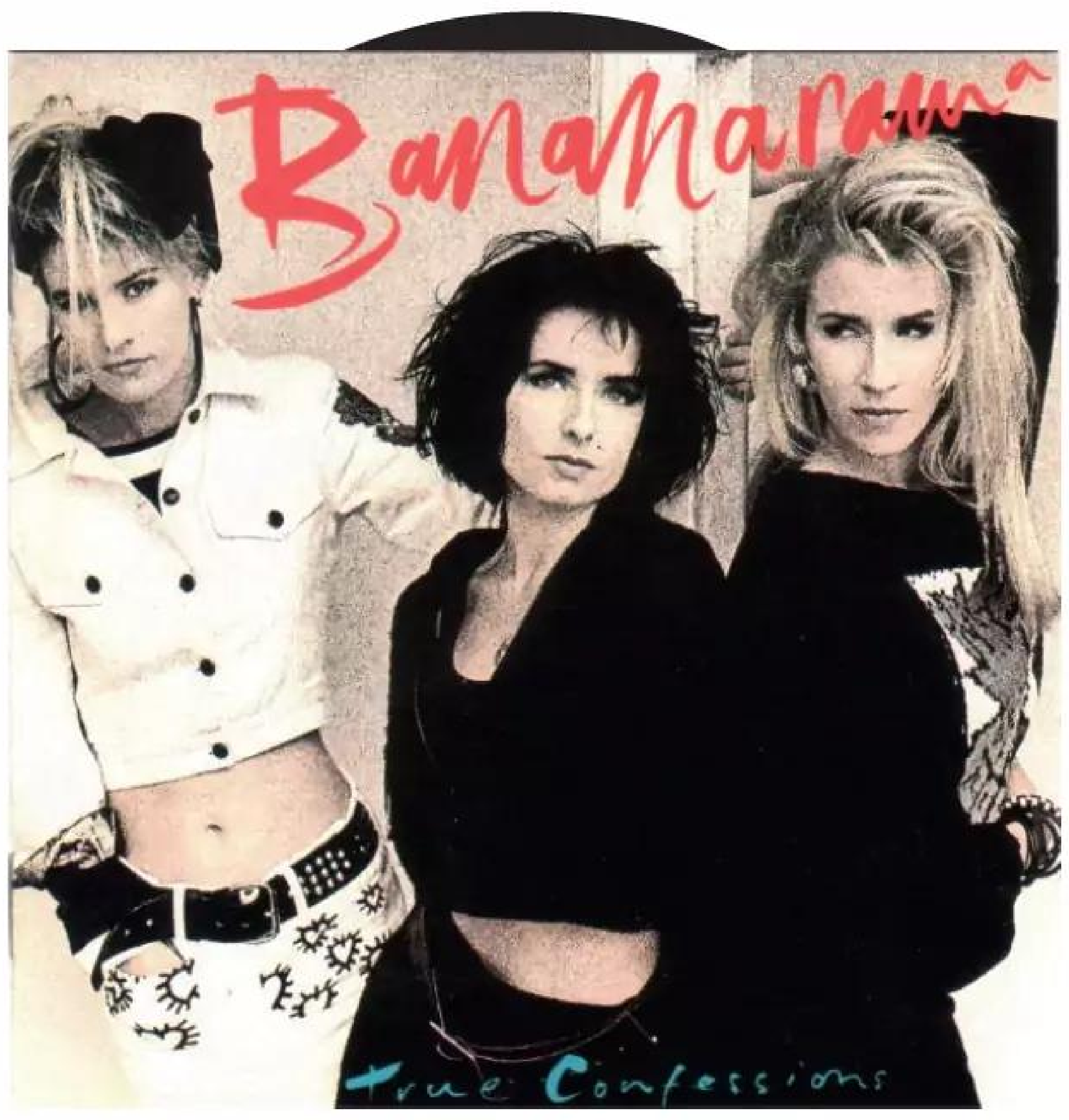
THE HOUSEMARTINS

With its capital-bashing title and stocked full of agit-pop hooks and pin-sharp social commentary, The Housemartins' album was a classic of the year, and introduced two future stars of pop: Paul Heaton, the superior songwriter who would go on to form The Beautiful South before finding ongoing success as a solo artist; and Norman Cook, later to metamorphose into superstar DJ Fatboy Slim. The self-defacing "fourth best band in Hull" cleverly wrapped their acerbic observations in uber-catchy, chart-ready tunes. Subjects covered range from icky bosses and political apathy to Christianity and Marxism (its sleeve announced "Take Jesus – Take Marx – Take Hope"), with its biggest hit *Happy Hour* crashing into the UK charts at No.3 and *Think For A Minute* making the Top 40. The mighty a capella *Caravan Of Love* would soon be at No.1.

> The self-defacing "fourth best band in Hull" cleverly wrapped their acerbic observations in uber-catchy, chart-ready tunes. Subjects ranged from icky bosses and political apathy to Christianity and Marxism.



TRUE CONFESSIONS

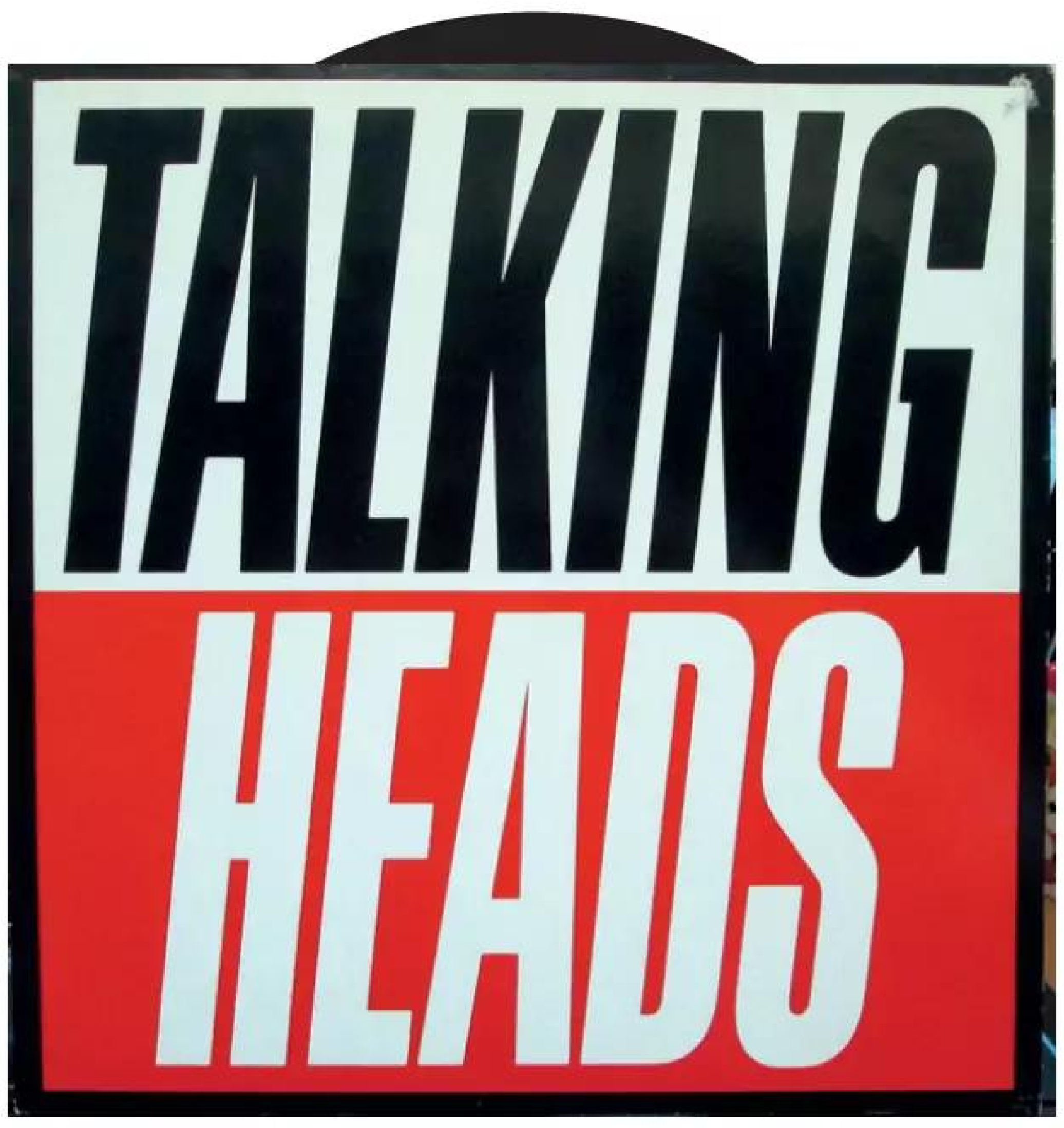
BANANARAMA

By the arrival of their third studio album, the Nanas were at the peak of their powers having secured six UK Top 10 hits. And Sara Dallin, Keren Woodward and Siobhan Fahey's third album *True Confessions* would harbour yet another smash success, in their definitive No.1 version of Shocking Blue's 1969 hit *Venus*, also a breakthrough chart-topper in the States. While Stock Aitken and Waterman were the team hired to add their hi-NRG touch to *Venus*, the LP's only big hit, the rest of the record was steered by regular producers Jolley & Swain. Tackling topics including drugs, social unrest and life on the streets, the LP missed the Top 40, but who cares when you're the the most successful female group in British music history.

BELINDA

BELINDA CARLISLE

Just over a year after a farewell live show with The Go-Gos at the Rock In Rio festival, Belinda Carlisle's debut solo LP arrived, elevated via tracks penned by her former band mates Charlotte Caffey and Paula Jean Brown, as well as co-written fare from the likes of The Bangles' Susanna Hoffs (*I Need A Disguise*) and Fleetwood Mac's Lindsey Buckingham (*Since You've Gone*). Carlisle's self-titled debut collection dispensed with her punk roots in exchange for a more pop rock-orientated sound that immediately won her fans in the States, landing at No.13 on the Billboard. Stateside No.3 hit single *Mad About You* led the charge, marking her transition to solo artist, helped along by guest guitar from Duran Duran's Andy Taylor.

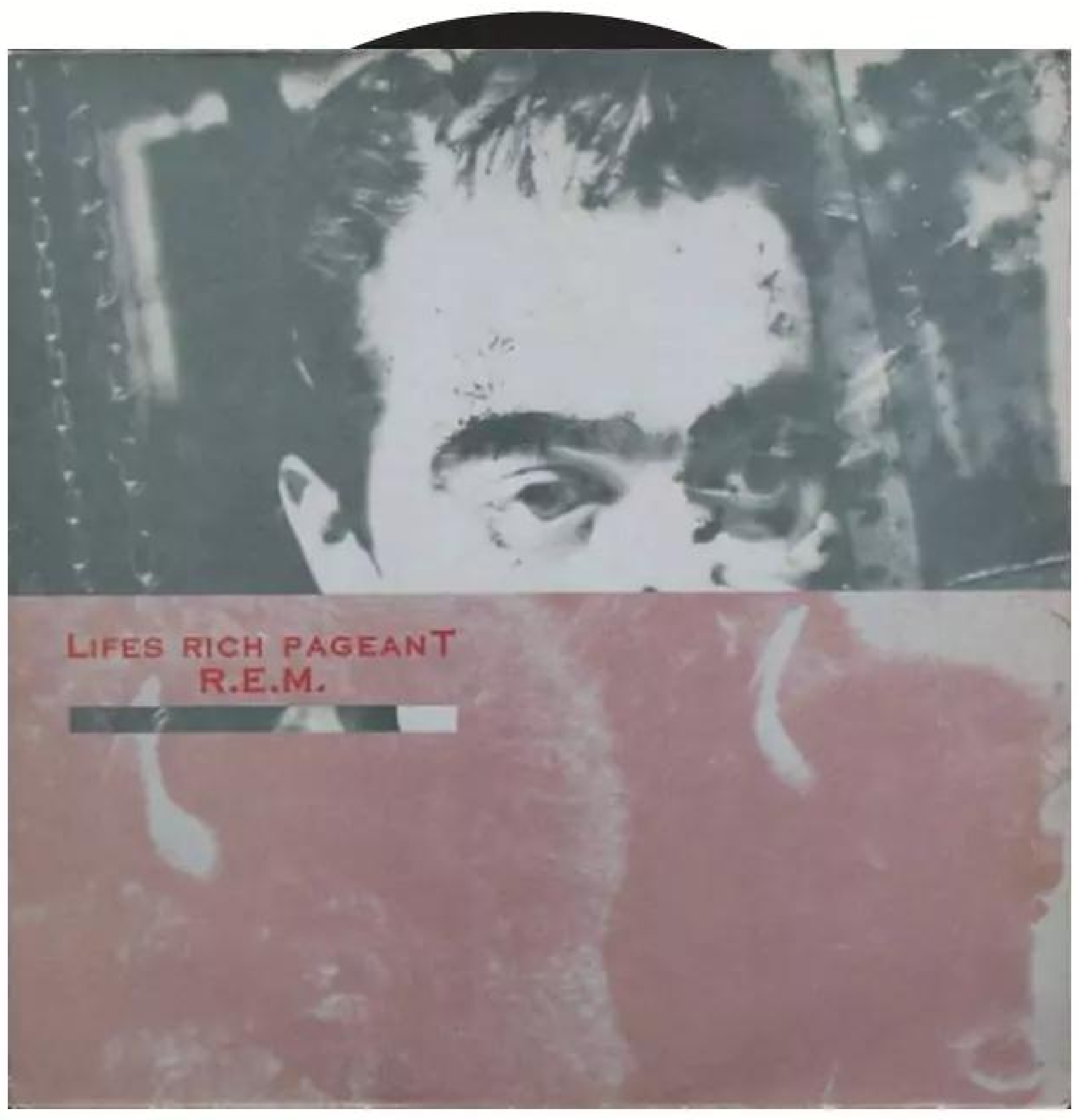


TRUE STORIES

TALKING HEADS

Seven albums in and Talking Heads were in an odd phase of their journey, seemingly lacking the explosion of art-rock creativity abundant in previous hit albums. Yet, while not beloved of fans as one of their finest, David Byrne's semi-soundtrack to his film of the same name, *True Stories* does have its charms. In particular we'd turn listeners' attention to stop-start opener *Love For Sale* and piano-chorded closer *City Of Dreams*, both solid fare, the moving click-clack pop of *Dream Operator*, featuring Annie McEnroe (who also appreared in the film), and its headline moments *Radio Head* (yes, that's where they got their name from) and *Wild Wild Life*, its picket fence-mocking biggest hit. An album that improves with every listen.

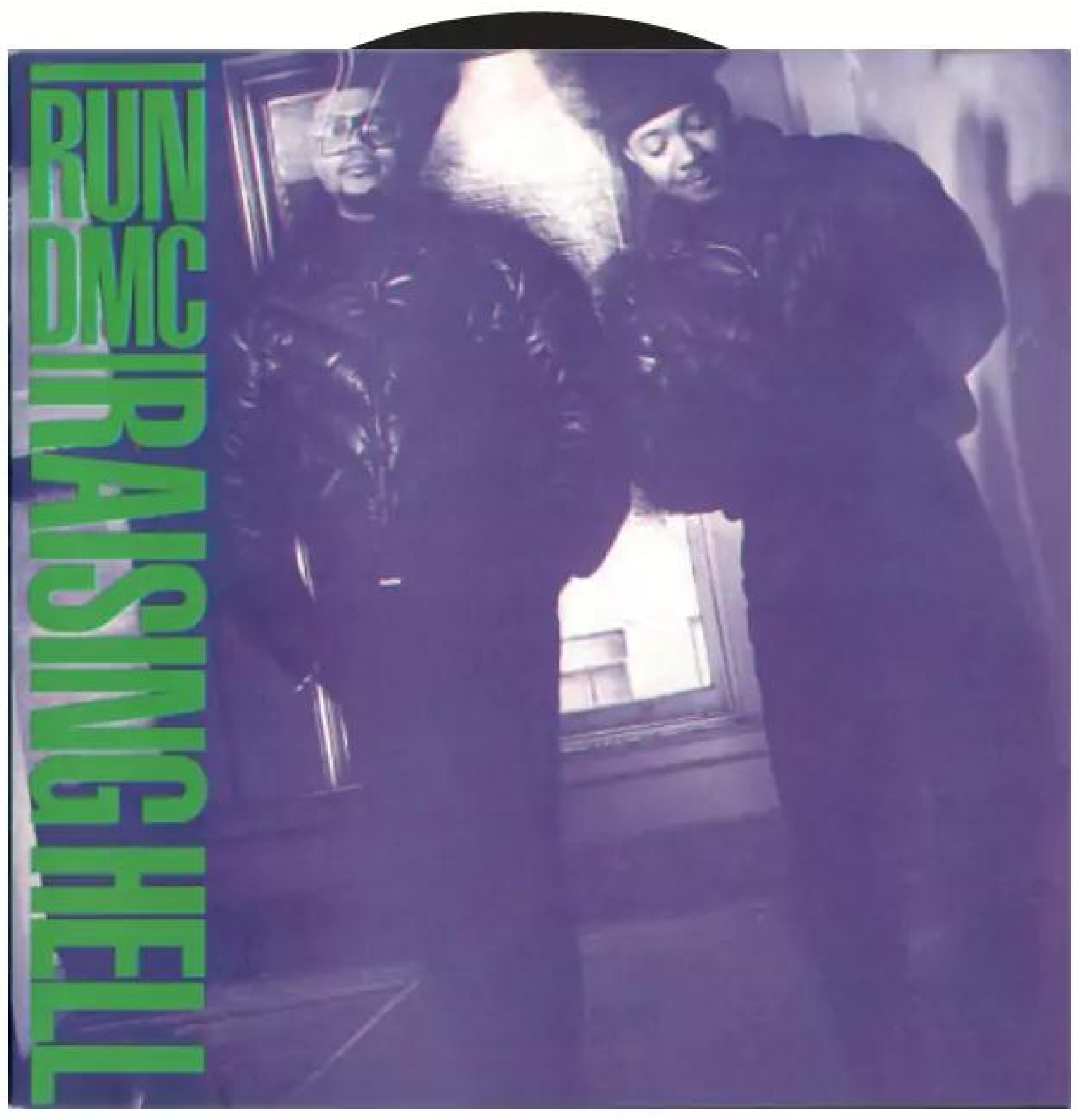
> From the instant hook of opening track *Everything Right Is Wrong Again* and on to its stuttering curtain closer *Rhythm Section Want Ad*, "The Pink Album", as it is often referred to, introduced TMBG's cleverly crafted odd-ball pop sonics to the world



LIFES RICH PAGEANT

R.E.M.

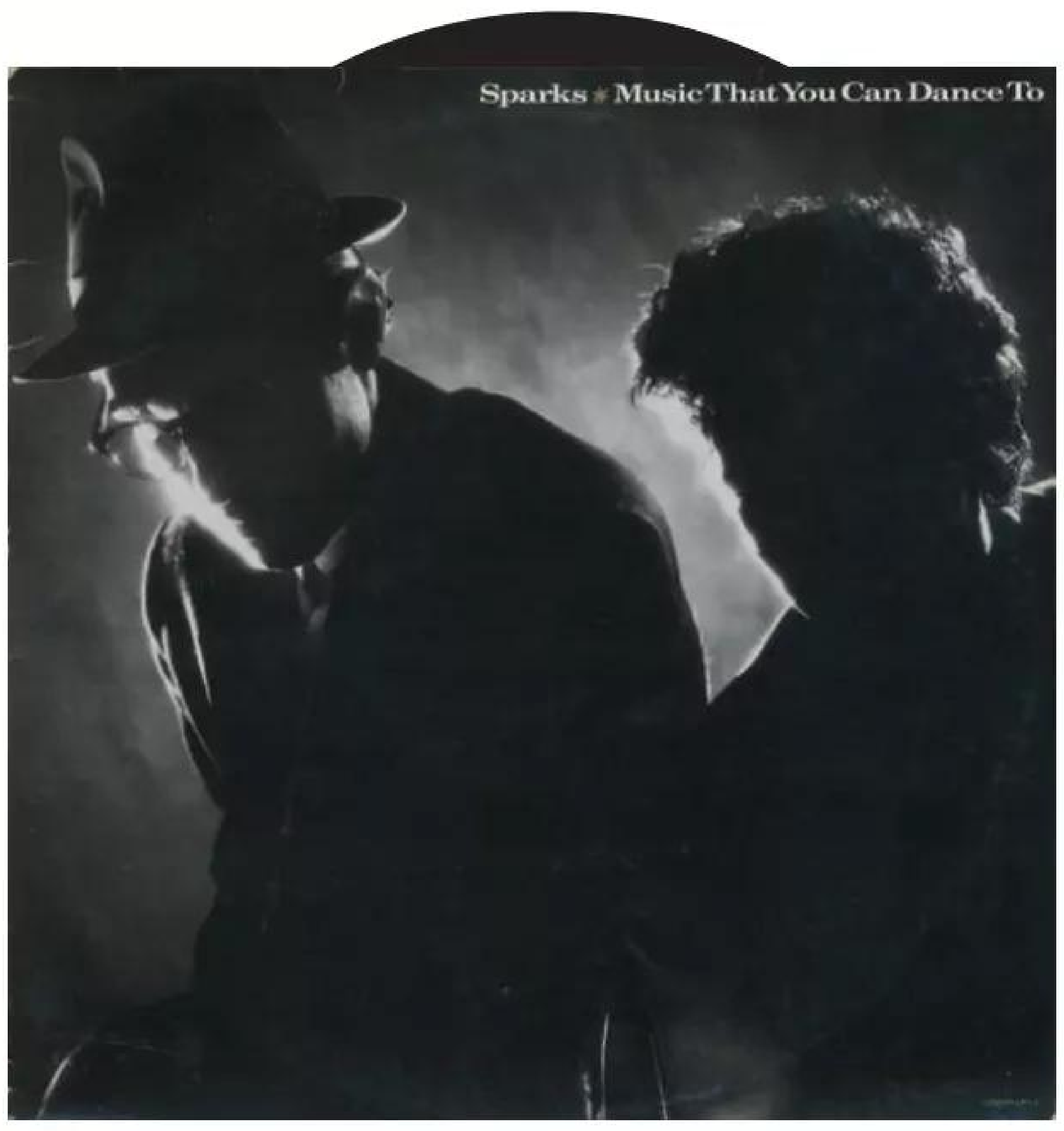
Lifes Rich Pageant was a big record for R.E.M., opening wide the door for the Georgian jangle poppers to move up a gear, its preceding trio of LPs laying the foundations for their ascent to mainstream appeal. Born of the "Athens Demos", the band decamped to John Mellencamp's Belmont Mall studio to complete the job. Shifting lanes from the murkier *Fables Of Reconstruction*, bigwig producer Don Gehman was enlisted to adjust the compass. And while Michael Stipe's vocals and lyrics are as slippery as ever, immediately evident on opener *Begin The Begin* ("a philanderer's tie, a murderer's shoe"), excitable guitars and rocked-up arrangements helped them turn a corner. With top tunes *These Days*, *Fall On Me* and *Hyena*, this is a regular in best-of-year lists.



RAISING HELL

RUN DMC

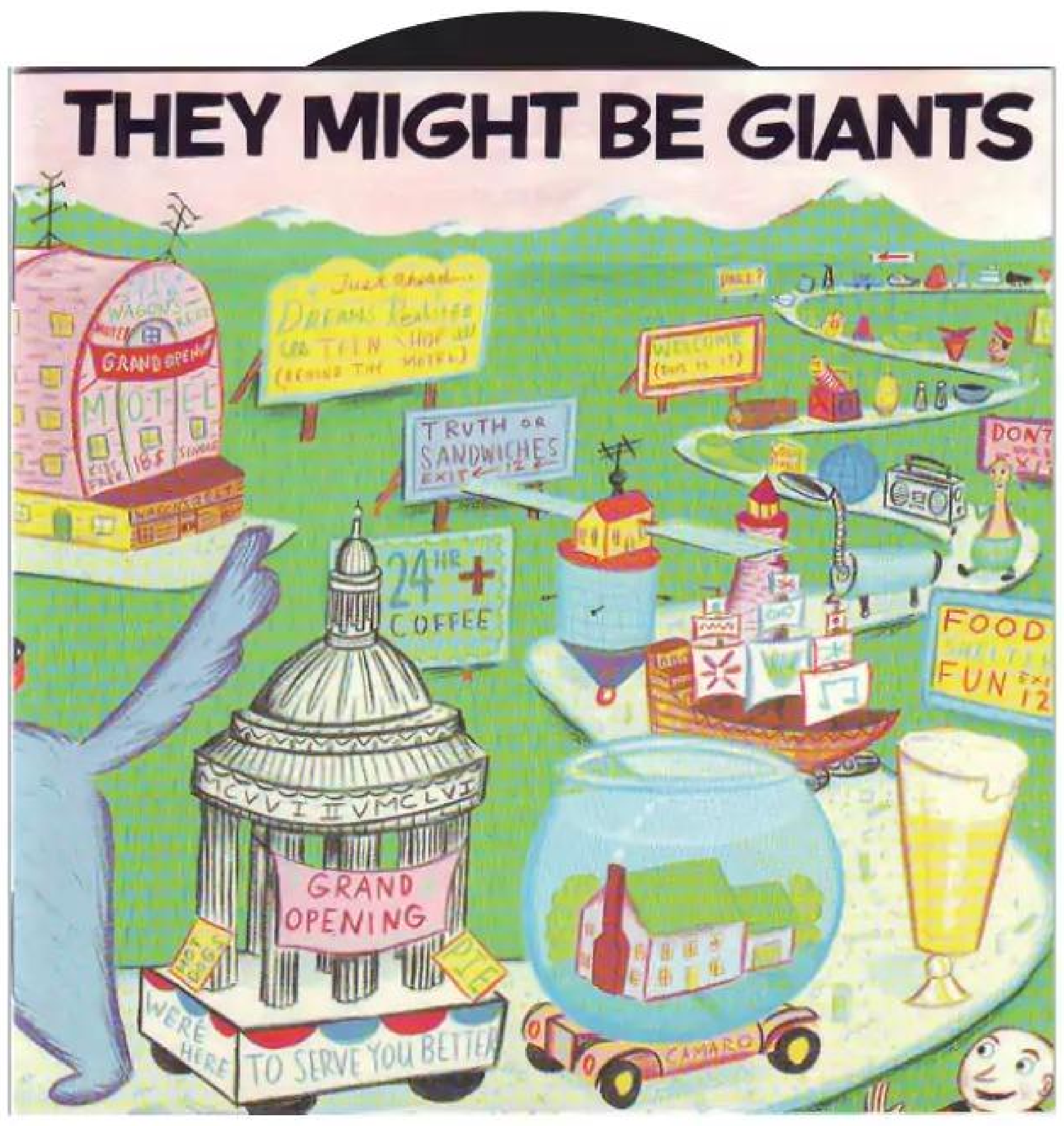
While a little outside of *Classic Pop*'s remit, Run DMC's third album is frankly impossible to ignore, such was its presence when it dropped in spring 1986. And yet it did add pop sensibilities to the hip-hop aesthetic, allowing the Queens trio to crossover into the American mainstream, and reaching an impressive Billboard No.3. Produced by Russell Simmons and Rick Rubin, this Grammy-nominated game-changer is hugely influential, its many highlights including *Peter Piper*, *You Be Illin'*, and the faultless, now ubiquitous *It's Tricky*. No doubt aided by its chart-busting, rock-infused collaboration with Aerosmith, *Walk This Way*, *Raising Hell* became the first platinum – and the first multi-platinum – hip-hop record. An all-time classic.


Sparks • Music That You Can Dance To

MUSIC THAT YOU CAN DANCE TO

SPARKS

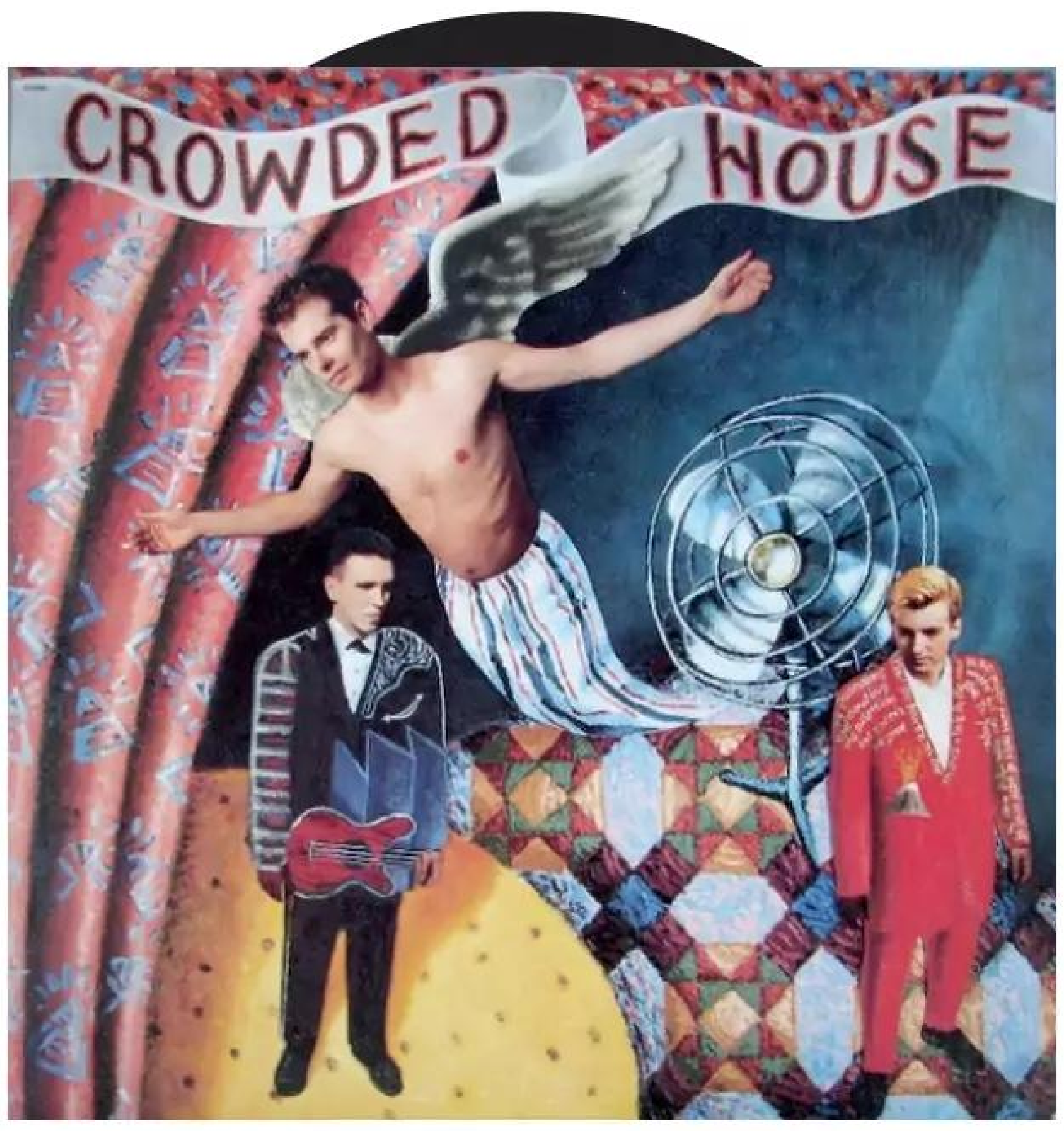
A whopping fourteen albums behind them, Sparks still had the creative juices liberally flowing. As its title made clear, the brothers Mael had their sights fixed on the dancefloor and with an array of samplers and sequencers at their disposal, added a hi-NRG feel to their recent synth-pop stylings, with Leslie Bohem's fuzz bass also high in the mix. Sparks' 1986 collection failed to make any commercial waves, however, and while the album's title track made the Top 10 in the Billboard dance chart, on the whole it pretty much tanked. Still, while never reaching the heights of their last proper attempt at exciting clubland, 1979's *No.1 in Heaven*, this still has some decent inventive moments, in the title track, *Fingertips*, *The Scene* and *Rosebud*.



THEY MIGHT BE GIANTS

THEY MIGHT BE GIANTS

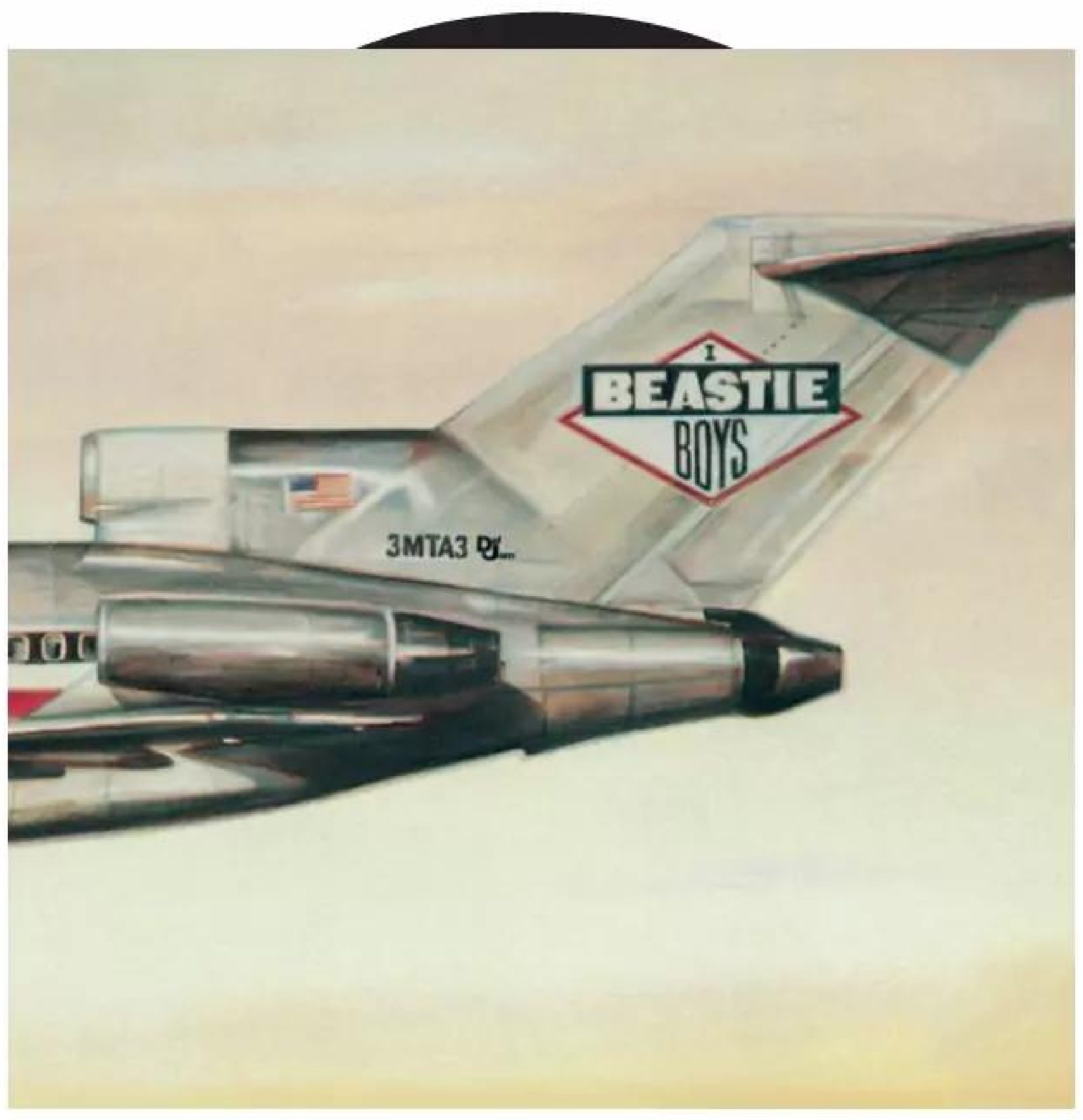
From the instant hook of opening track *Everything Right Is Wrong Again* and on to stuttering curtain closer *Rhythm Section Want Ad*, "The Pink Album", as it is often referred to, introduced TMBG's cleverly crafted oddball-pop sonics to the world. Theirs is an effervescent sea of sounds, that provides a quirky framework on which John Linnell's witty take on existence can wander free, exploring everything from sex workers and angels to toddlers and chess. It's a boisterous and shiny debut statement from the Brooklyn duo that reportedly nicked their name from a ventriloquist, with influences grabbed from anywhere and everywhere, be it alt-pop, hillbilly country, big band, funk, synth-pop and on. Best tracks: *Don't Let's Start*, *She's An Angel* and that oh-so catchy opener.



CROWDED HOUSE

CROWDED HOUSE

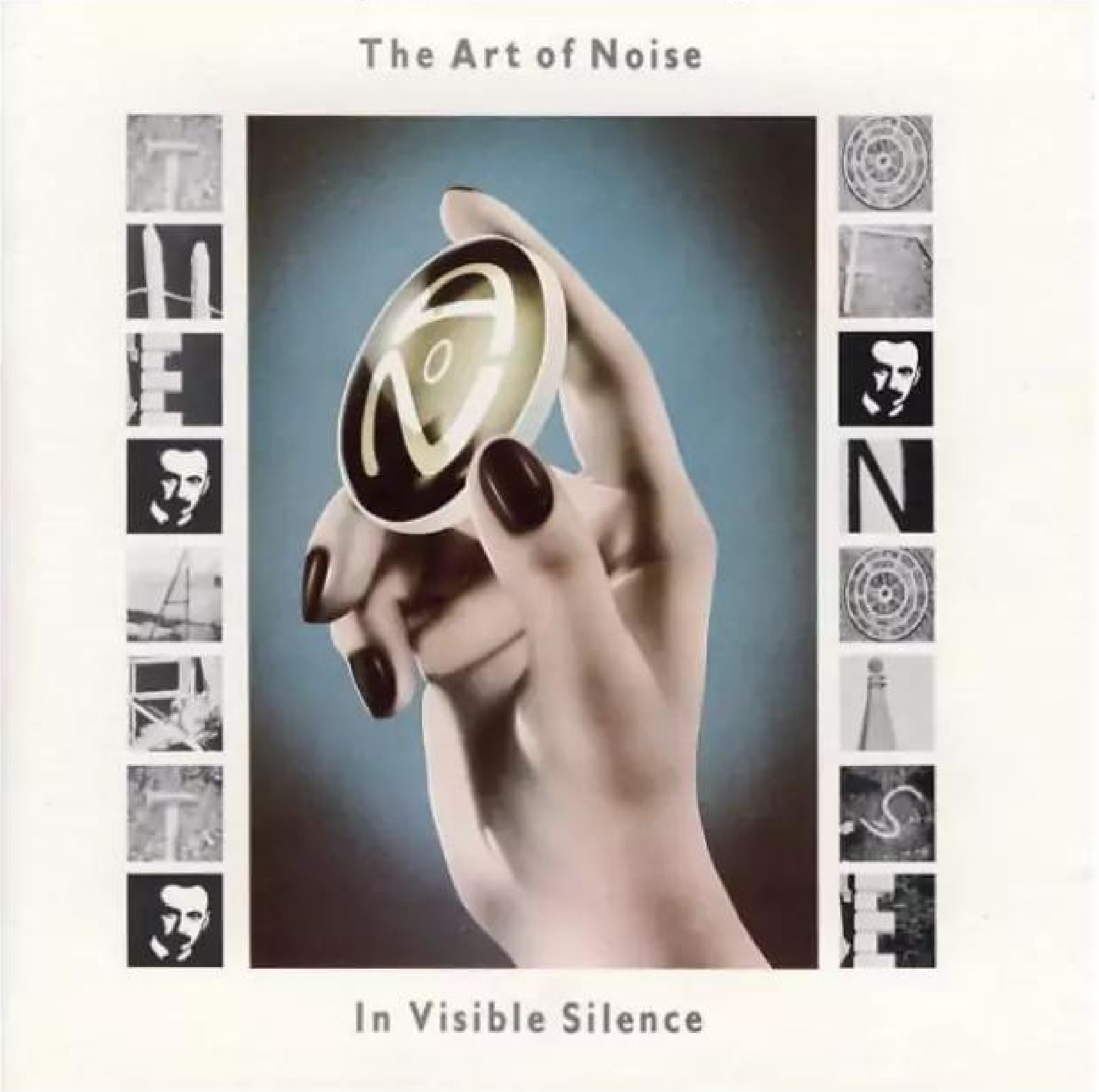
Named after the cramped accomodation given them by their record label in the Hollywood Hills, Crowded House were super successful from the off. The first set from the Aussie-Kiwi outfit bagged them platinum status in no less than four countries, thanks in no small part to the band's worldwide smash hit ballad *Don't Dream It's Over*, a Billboard No.2 that went one better to snatch the summit in Australia. The album was mostly captured in sunny L.A., and immediately showcased Neil Finn's songwriting prowess with rousing radio-friendly melodies aplenty and an equally assured vocal ability. From stadium-ready singalongs to intimate musical portraits, this is a collection stocked full of charm and for unashamed, classically written guitar pop, this is hard to top.



LICENSED TO ILL

BEASTIE BOYS

Another hip-hop act to crossover in '86 with seeming ease was boombox-loving, trouble-stirring Brooklyn trio the Beastie Boys. The very first rap album to top the Billboard album charts, *Licensed To Ill* married cheeky daftness, a unique vocal style and punk rock guitars to blockbusting triumph and birthed several all-time perennials in college party tracks, *No Sleep Till Brooklyn* and *Fight For Your Right*. Rick Rubin was at the helm here, in a controversial record which band member Adam "Ad Rock" Horowitz ultimately apologised for, writing in a heartfelt letter to *Time Out* New York in 1999, "I would like to... formally apologise to the entire gay and lesbian community for the shitty and ignorant things we said on our first record."



IN VISIBLE SILENCE

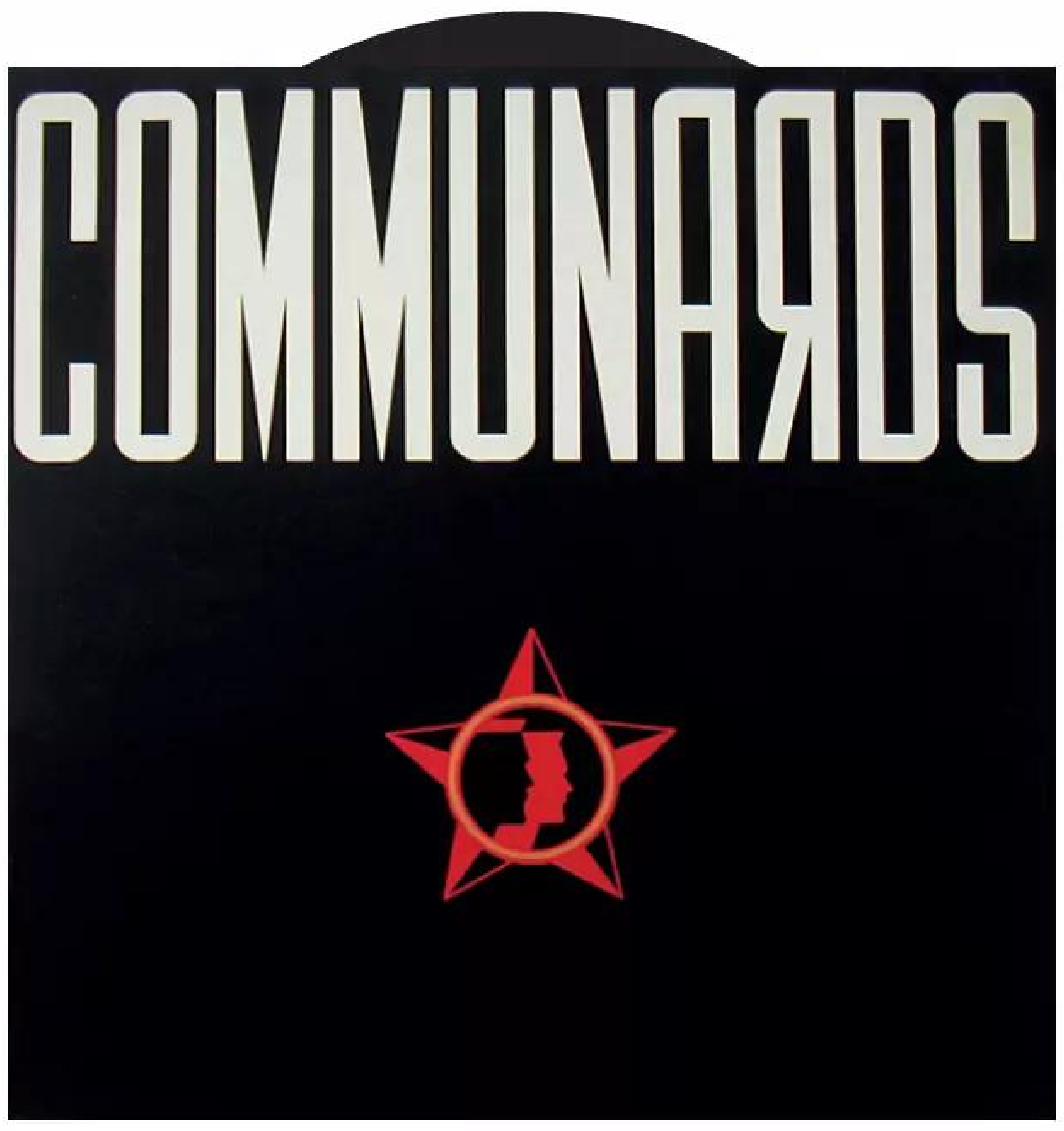
ART OF NOISE

Masters of the avant garde, when it comes to bringing synth-pop experimentalism to mainstream attention, Anne Dudley, JJ Jeczalik and Gary Langan touched gold with platinum-selling second LP *In Visible Silence*. Its two standouts led the way – *Peter Gunn* (UK No.8), featuring guitar icon Duane Eddy, and *Paranoimia* enlisting TV character Max Headroom, its single version (UK No.12) voiced by actor Matt Frewer. "We wanted to do something that was a little bit more polished than the stuff we'd done for ZTT," Dudley told *Classic Pop*. "We wanted to do something with a bit more variety… to prove that we were a force to be reckoned with." *Opus 4* is a *CP* favourite, inspired by Thomas Hood's poem *November*, and Dudley's pick, the deeply atmospheric *Instruments of Darkness*, a highlight.

KING OF AMERICA

ELVIS COSTELLO

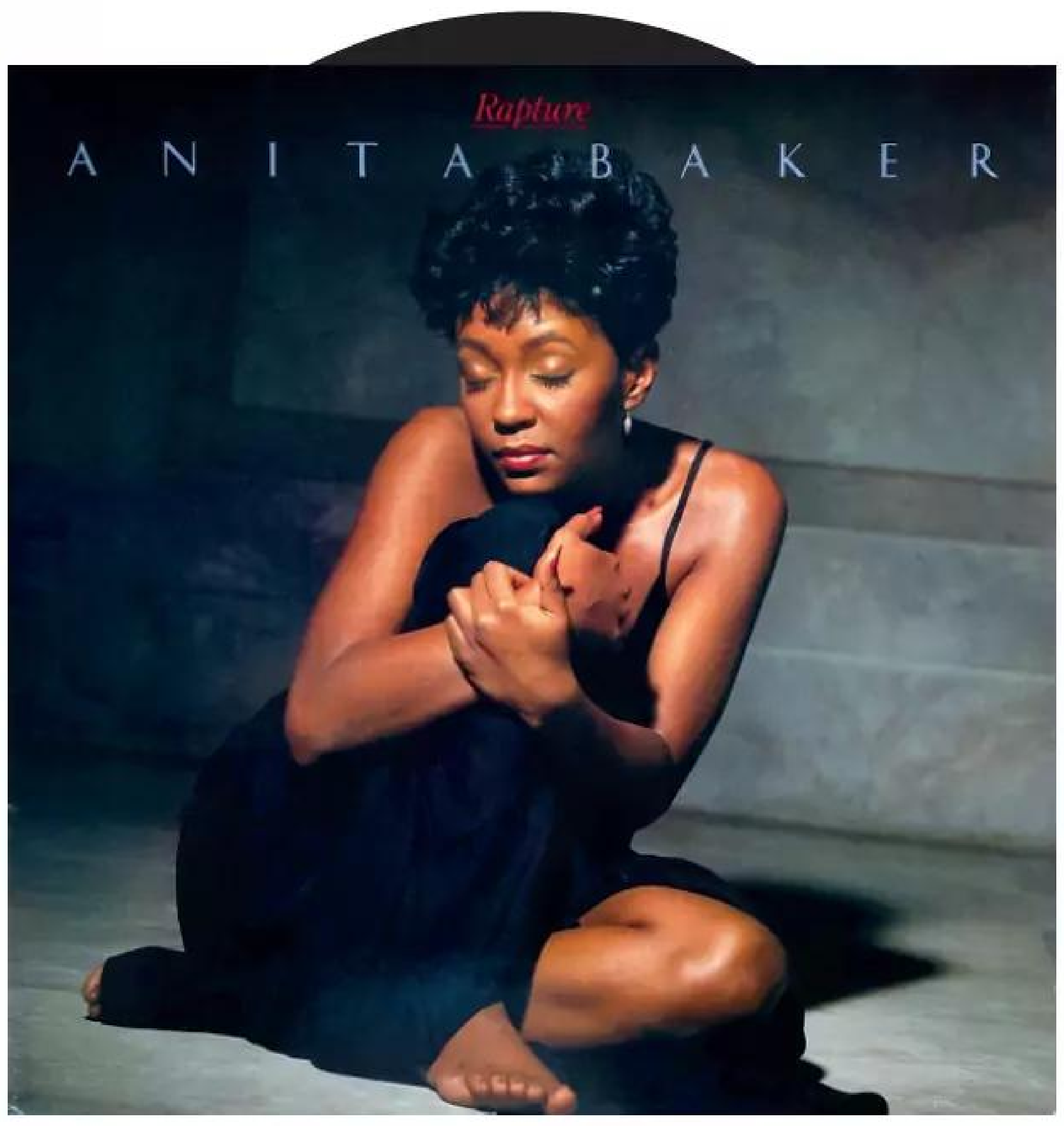
Having just toured alongside him as "the Coward Brothers", album number ten for Elvis Costello was co-produced by T Bone Burnett, and released as "The Costello Show". Laid down in Los Angeles, its slick assembly of hired guns was enigmatically monikered by Elvis as "the Confederates". No doubt enlisted with the help of a well-connected Burnett, the record utilised Elvis Presley's 70s TCB band associates, guitarist James Burton, bassist Jerry Scheff and sticksman Ron Tutt, as well as jazz bassist Ray Brown and New Orleans legend, drummer Earl Palmer. Unleashed with Costello's usual biting humour and ever-sharpened wit, its high quality throughout, with *Glitter Gulch*, *Jack of All Parades*, *Brilliant Mistake*, *Lovable* and *Indoor Fireworks* our picks.



THE COMMUNARDS

COMMUNARDS

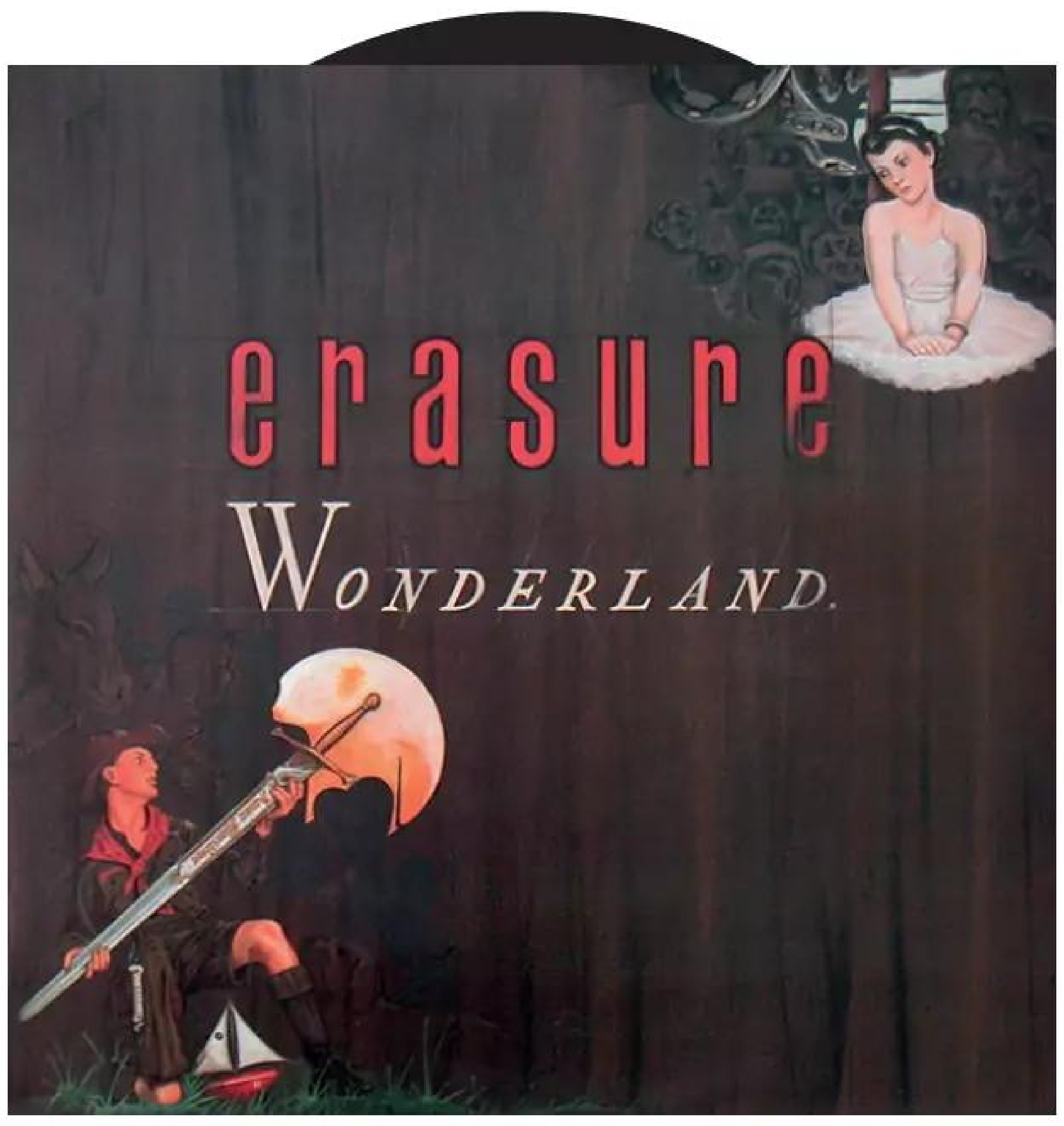
It's mega-hit *Don't Leave Me This Way* took Harold Melvin And The Blue Notes' 1975 side to UK No.1 and became one of the standout tracks – and biggest-selling single – of the entire year. Having departed Bronski Beat, singer Jimmy Somerville paired up with the now godly Richard Coles for a record that explored synth-pop (*So Cold The Night*, dedicated to Nelson Mandela), hi-NRG (*Disenchanted*) and torch song piano balladry (*La Dolarosa*), while maintaining Somerville's political bent: a prime example being *Reprise*, squarely aimed at Margret Thatcher ("All the dreams you will destroy/ And leave me lost and vulnerable"). With Bronski producer Mike Thorne at the mixing desk, and with its classy graphic sleeve, *Communards* peaked at UK No.7.



RAPTURE

ANITA BAKER

A soft-hearted and tender addition to the quiet storm arena, *Rapture*'s big single *Sweet Love* was one of the hits of the year (US No.2/UK No.8), the deliciously addictive capstone of an album that deservedly earned Detroit-born Anita Baker two Grammy Awards. With over eight million sales worldwide, here was the epitome of sophisticated symphonic pop, Baker's refined, utterly sublime vocals charming the ears with little trouble and with a deep romanticism reflected in the straightforward yet earnest lyrics. Baker finessed her contralto singing gospel in church as a kid, then cut her secular teeth in disco/funk band Chapter 8, before going solo. This, her slow-burn second LP, left everyone who heard it mesmerised and feeling that little bit better about the day to day.

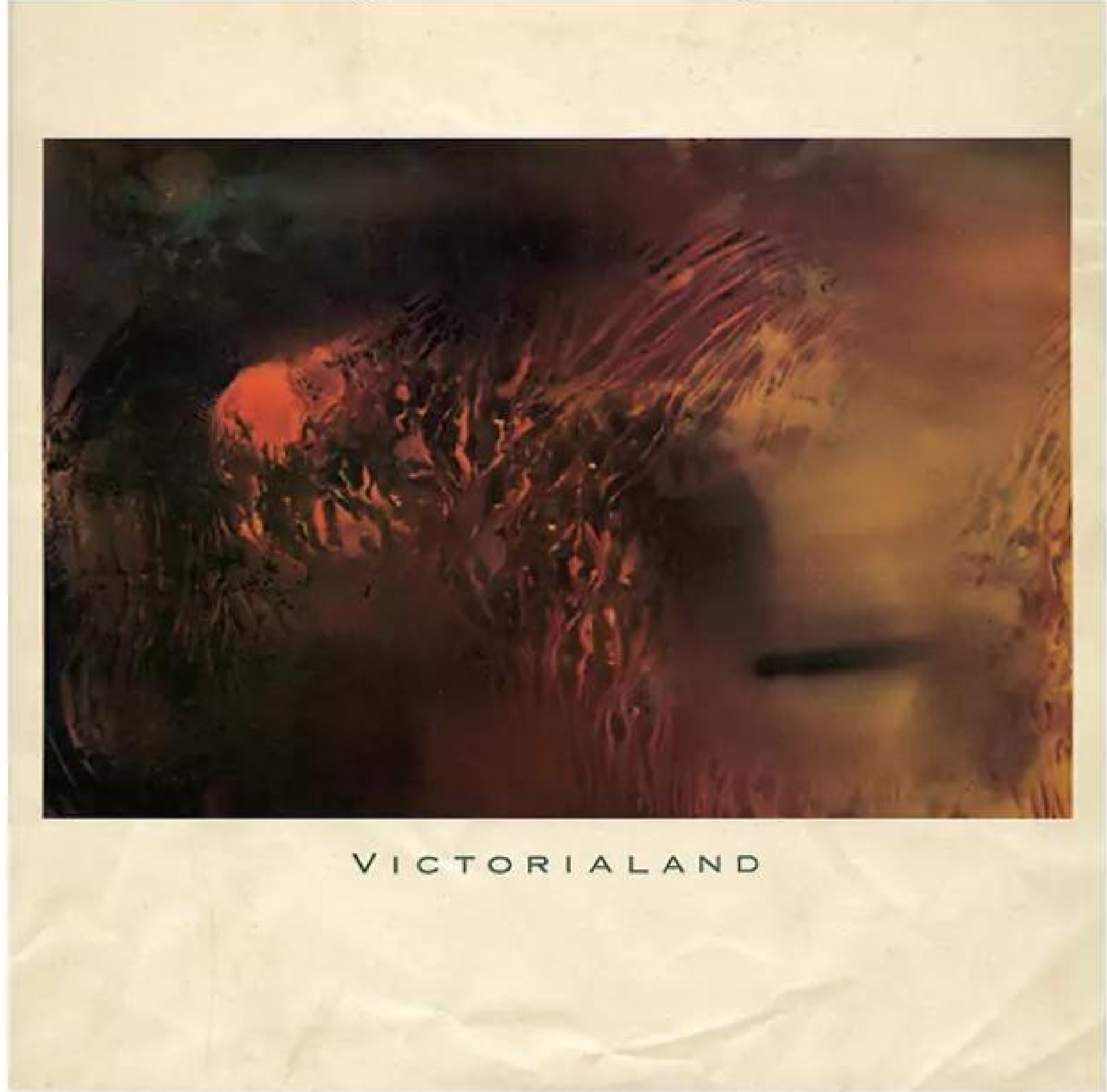


WONDERLAND

ERASURE

Whilst it introduced the duo's natural dexterity for fashioning synth-pop hooks and sky-searching melodies when it dropped in summer 1986, Erasure's debut long-player was a relative failure compared to what lay ahead in their chart-busting catalogue, with all three singles missing the UK Top 40 entirely. That said, later re-released remixes of its best two tracks *Who Needs Love Like That?* and *Oh L'Amour* would make the Top 10 and Top 20 respectively. Helmed by uber producer-in-the-making Flood, beyond its stinkers (the less said about *Pistol…*), it's one of Andy Bell and Vince Clarke's most underrated LPs. Other good bits include *Push Me Shove Me* and *Cry So Easy* – their fortunes would take an upward turn with the relase of *Sometimes* shortly after.

> By the release of their romantically titled fourth album, Elizabeth Fraser and Robin Guthrie had mastered their craft with an exquisitely fragile, utterly haunting, dreamstate-inducing masterpiece



VICTORIALAND

COCTEAU TWINS

By the release of their romantically titled fourth album, Elizabeth Fraser and Robin Guthrie had mastered their craft with an exquisitely fragile, utterly haunting, dreamstate-inducing masterpiece that stood out like the sorest of thumbs in the musical environment of the mid-80s. Fraser's serene vocal tones are sublime atop Guthrie's delicate guitarwork, supple melodies that were ethereal, blissed-out and frankly spellbinding. For a taste of what's on offer, *Throughout The Dark Months Of April And May, Little Spacey, How To Bring A Blush To The Snow* and *The Thinner The Air* are all top draw, but drop the needle anywhere on *Victorialand* and we're sure you'll be as addicted as we are. *Melody Maker* loved it, calling it a "gilded pillar of excellence".

FOREVER BREATHES THE LONELY WORD

FELT

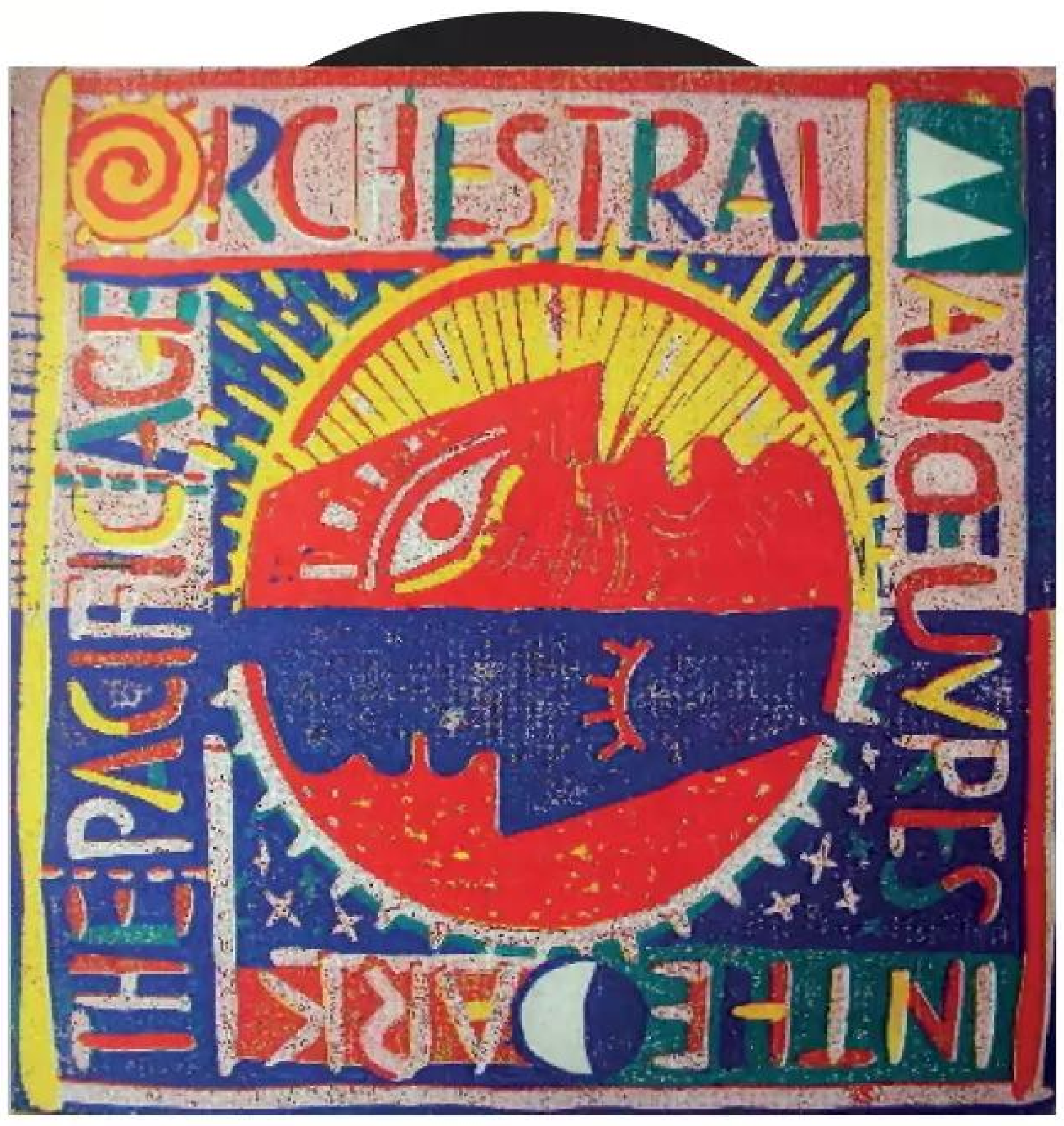
Released on the mighty Creation Records in September, Felt's sixth album provided a beautifully crafted, upbeat soundtrack to bring the year to a close. It's sleeve featured a photo of keyboardist Martin Duffy, whose whirring Hammond organ lines augment the whole collection, providing its distinct alt-pop vistas. With lead guitarist Maurice Deebank now departed, plentiful space was available for Duffy to fly. And here, he injected the band's sound with a welcome new lease of life and lifting the vivid melancholy of the reclusive Lawrence's poetry marvellously skyward via sunshine riffs aplenty aside the jangle of guitars. An indie masterpiece, *NME* declared it "the first truly classic Creation album" – and we'd agree.

Spandau Ballet Through The Barricades

THROUGH THE BARRICADES

SPANDAU BALLET

As its title suggested, *Through The Barricades* was a statement album for Spandau Ballet. Not only were they continuing the manifesto begun with *Parade* – to record music that reflected their live shows, particularly after Live Aid – but they wanted to show they were far more weighty a prospect than their hit ballads *True* and *Gold* had suggested. Album number five would embrace the rockier elements of their sound, in part thanks to time spent in Dublin with new friends Def Leppard. "We've captured a lot of that live feel and raw energy on the new album," Gary Kemp told *Number One*. "There are still a lot of misconceptions about us as a band. That's why we called it *Through the Barricades*. People still think we're all just posers and we can't play our instruments." A UK No.7.


ORCHESTRAL MANOEUVRES IN THE DARK
THE PACIFIC AGE

THE PACIFIC AGE

OMD

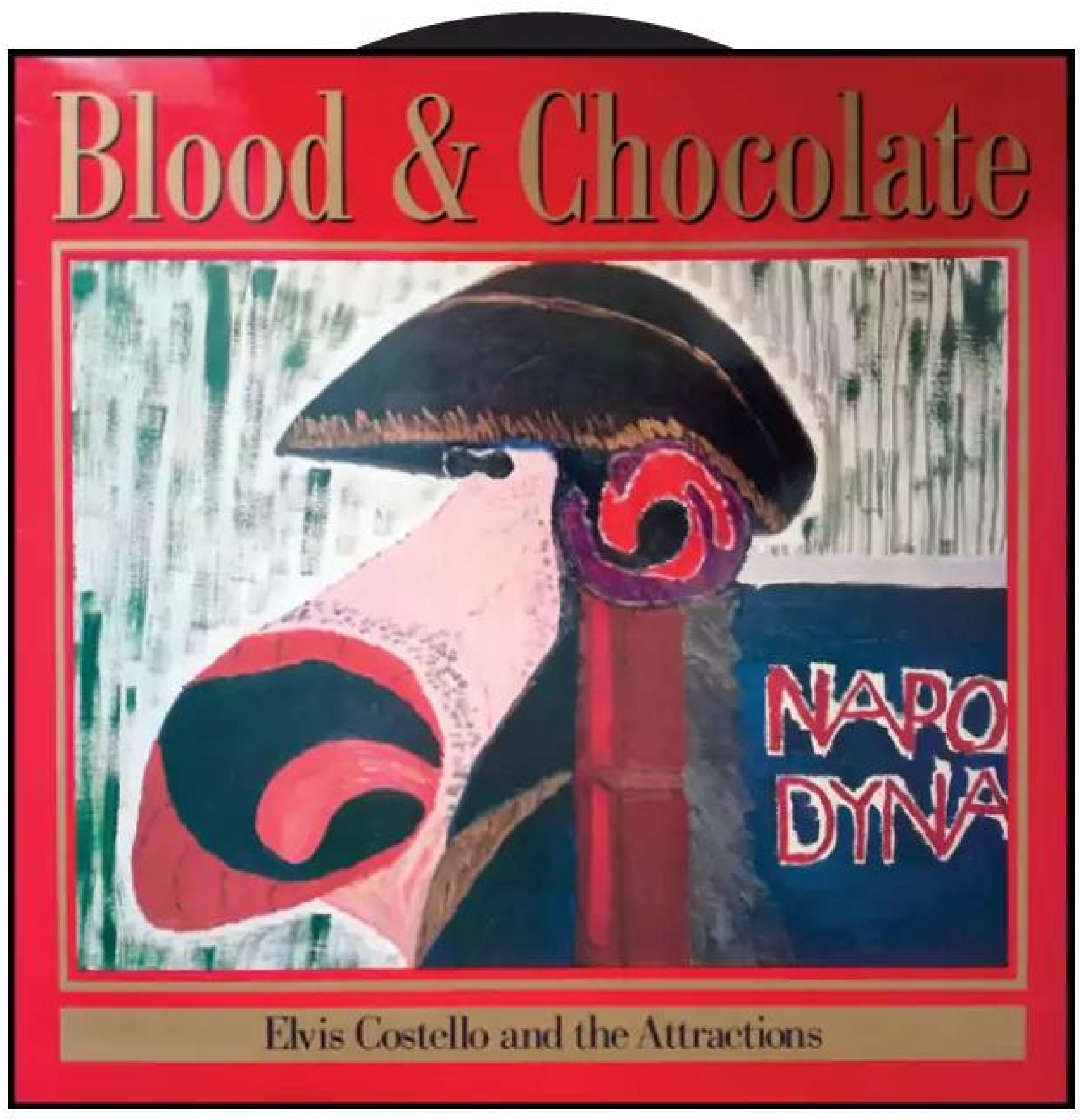
The last OMD album with producer Stephen Hague at the controls, *The Pacific Age* furthered the glossier sophisti-pop-heavy sound exhibited on previous album *Crush*, with the group now expanded to a sixpiece line-up. Another helmed by Hague, that album also gave them their first American success with *So In Love* landing at Billboard No.26, quickly followed by their standalone single cut for the *Pretty In Pink* soundtrack, *If You Leave*, that provided their highest Stateside charter (No.4). With *The Pacific Age*'s lead single *(Forever) Live And Die* landing at US No.19, things were looking up for OMD. And yet those triumphs were shortlived. While the album made the UK Top 20, the band collapsed shortly afterwards, reforming in 1991 for an eighth album, *Sugar Tax*.

STAR
5
Silk & Steel

SILK & STEEL

FIVE STAR

Released at the close of 1985, Five Star's big hit *System Addict* had given them their first UK Top 10, and sophomore collection *Silk & Steel* would continue the upward trend. 1986 was to be a bumper year of success for the Pearson siblings in Britain with the LP scoring a No.1 placing and several of the album's singles in heavy rotation on the airwaves: *Can't Wait Another Minute, Find The Time* and *Rain Or Shine* all made the UK Top 10 in '86, while two more, *Stay Out Of My Life* and *The Slightest Touch*, followed suit in the early months of 1987. However, with the purchase of their mansion Stone Court and a garage full of supercars showing off their moneyed lifestyle, the backlash was unfairly vicious and by the decade's close success would grind to a halt. Five Star folded in 1995.


Blood & Chocolate
Elvis Costello and the Attractions

BLOOD & CHOCOLATE
ELVIS COSTELLO & THE ATTRACTIONS

After a falling out with his band and a troublesome period in his personal life, Elvis Costello was thankfully back with the Attractions and the group's longtime producer Nick Lowe for a second album in one year. While the aforementioned *King Of America* was roots rock, *Blood & Chocolate* was a return to the Attractions' classic sound that upped the rock'n'rolling once more, for what Costello descibed as "a record of people beating and twanging things with a fair amount of yelling". Typically acerbic in both the venom of its lyrics and its brutal, angered sound, the band's ninth record isn't for everyone, but with tracks such as the rolling *Next Time Round* and the epic *Tokyo Storm Warning*, this is more than worthy of inclusion here.

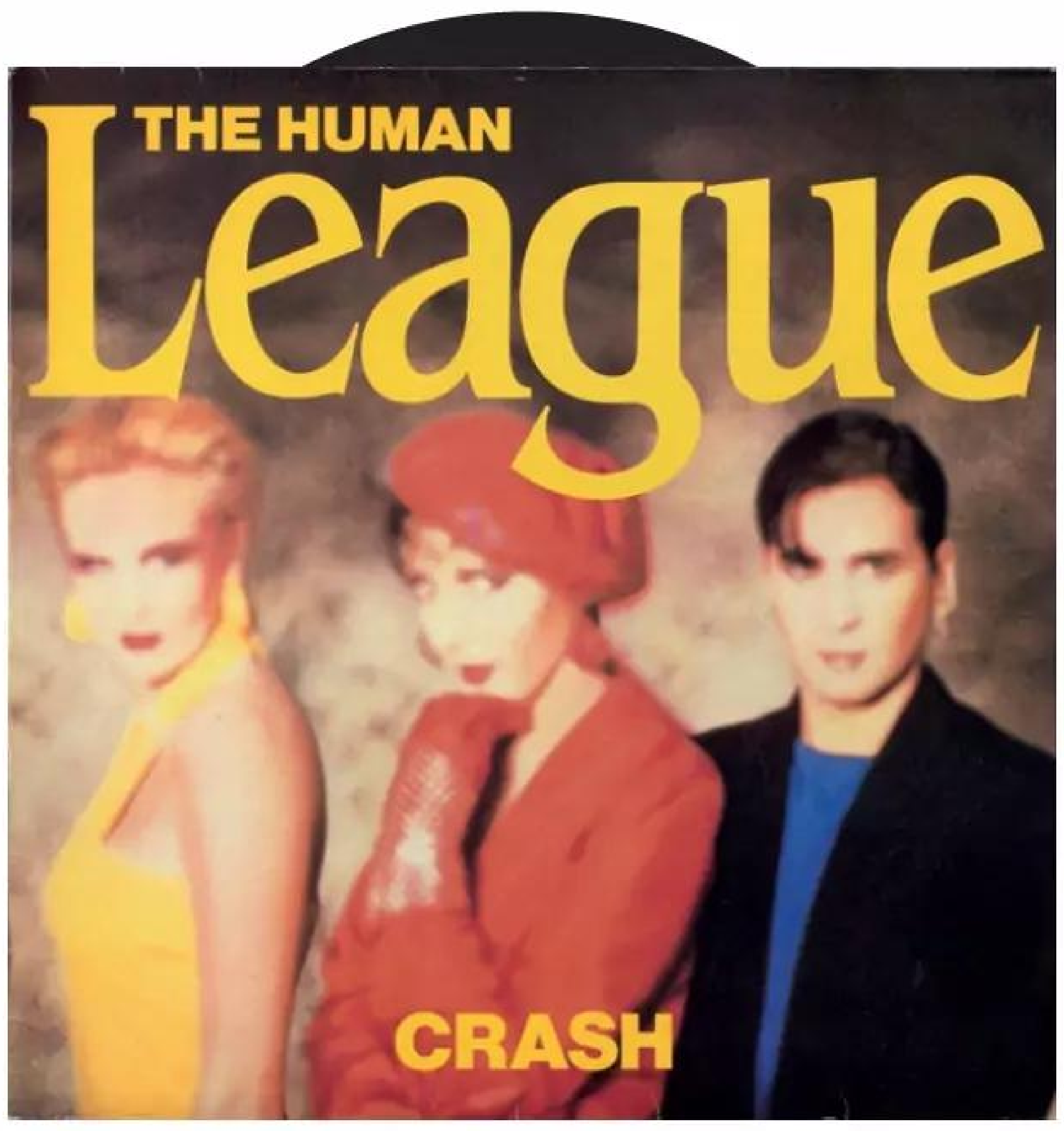
ALBUM
PUBLIC IMAGE LTD.

With a broad cast of all-star accomplices, PiL's simply titled fifth album was a commercial success for John Lydon and co., landing at UK No.14, it's much-aped minimalist sleeve as cool as its contents. Co-written with producer Bill Laswell and members of his live band, plenty of heavy guitars (some, perhaps unexpectedly, from guitar maestro Steve Vai) and some sizeable drums occupy its grooves, albeit with zero credits on the album sleeve to be sure exactly who's doing what here. Suffice it to say that such diverse musical marvels as ex-Funkadelic and Parliament keyboardist Bernie Worrell, Japanese electronic music legend Ryuichi Sakamoto and celebrated vocalist Bernard Fowler, all make an appearance. The ubiquitous *Rise* is, of course, it's star number.

Nik KERSHAW
RADIO MUSICOLA

RADIO MUSICOLA
NIK KERSHAW

Intelligent, highly musical, yet still maintaining the hooks, Nik Kershaw's self-produced *Radio Musicola* went down well with the critics but fell short in the terms of sales. It was a big budget, big production affair and exhibits some seriously complex rhythms – perhaps it's crack team of English sessioneers – including the highly capable Kick Horns and synth from Wix and Andy Richards – were the only musos capable of delivering its intricacies. That and a bank of state-of-the-art tech, embraced by Kershaw on the record, assured a unique listen. Lyrics were aimed squarely at the vicious tabloid press and attacks on personal privacy, with our top picks being the brilliant title track, *Life Goes On*, *LABATYD* and *James Cagney*. A rewarding listen, yet one that missed the Top 40.



CRASH
THE HUMAN LEAGUE

"It's not a Human League album," Phil Oakey once told *Classic Pop*. With the LP in the (almost) full control of Minneapolis R&B production duo Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis, he certainly has a point. But it's a refreshing record that relied less on their usual analogue synth sound and on the whole worked well, showing The League as you've never heard them before. Jam & Lewis ("the most talented musicians we've been in a room with" – Phil) were riding high off their first No.1 hit with Janet Jackson's *When I Think Of You* and The Human League's opening offering from *Crash*, *Human*, would go on to be their second. "It's our Minneapolis soul album," added Oakey, "and Jimmy and Terry did it, we let them do it, and we were happy."

AND THERE'S MORE...

There's plenty more joy to be had from the LPs of 1986, from goth and funk to electronica and folk. Here's our pick.

TALKING WITH THE TAXMAN ABOUT POETRY
BILLY BRAGG

FORCE
A CERTAIN RATIO

A KIND OF MAGIC
QUEEN

YOUR FUNERAL... MY TRIAL
NICK CAVE AND THE BAD SEEDS

FLAUNT IT
SIGUE SIGUE SPUTNIK

SHOP ASSISTANTS
SHOP ASSISTANTS

GET CLOSE
THE PRETENDERS

EXPRESS
LOVE & ROCKETS

GOD'S OWN MEDICINE
THE MISSION

WORD UP!
CAMEO

GIANT
THE WOODENTOPS

THE BIG LAD IN THE WINDMILL
IT BITES

> *Blood & Chocolate* was a return to the Attractions' classic sound that upped the rock'n'rolling once more, for what Costello described as "a record of people beating and twanging things with a fair amount of yelling"

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eighties electronic eclectic
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SOFT CELL ON THE ART OF FALLING APART
"We'd had massive success and wanted to destroy it in front of the fans"
CLASSIC ALBUM
EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW
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"THE BAND ALWAYS BELIEVED WE WERE GOING TO ASCEND AGAIN – AND IT'S HAPPENED!"
Jim Kerr and Charlie Burchill on their lifelong bromance and Once Upon A Time's 40th anniversary reissue
OMD CRUSH IT IN THE STATES
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PLUS
MARIAH CAREY ALBUM BY ALBUM

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BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN > PRETENDERS > ALISON MOYET > ROXY MUSIC > SPANDAU BALLET > SOFT CELL
THE HUMAN LEAGUE > CULTURE CLUB > ADAM & THE ANTS > ABC > HAIRCUT 100 > TEARS FOR FEARS
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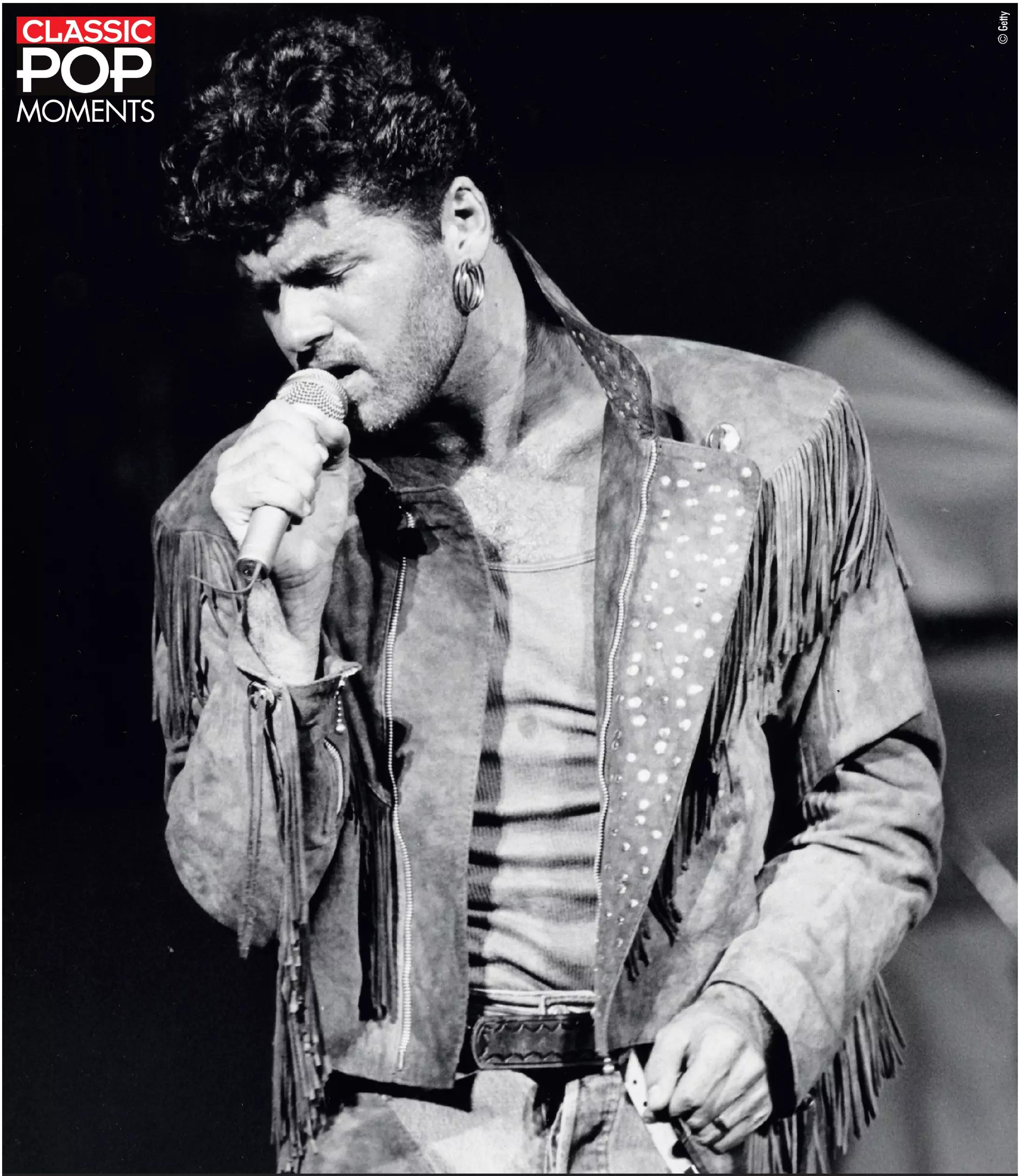
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24 MARCH 1986

GEORGE MICHAEL GOES SOLO

A mere four years after they'd risen to superstar status, George Michael and Andrew Ridgeley closed the curtain on Wham! with their sold-out Wembley Stadium spectacular, The Final, performed in front of 72,000 adoring fans. While George called it the "most important day of my life" at the time, another huge moment would quickly follow behind. 1984's *Careless Whisper*, from Wham!'s *Make It Big* LP, had laid the framework for his transition, but it wasn't until Michael's heartache ballad *A Different Corner* that the move was set in stone. Penned by George while Wham! were at their peak, the track was mooted to appear on the *Top Gun* movie soundtrack, a request turned down by George. "I felt like shit," the singer recalled in 2014, of writing the song. "I went in and recorded exactly the way I felt, and that's the way it sounds. It was partly Wham! and partly the end of a relationship." Success arrived instantly, with the single stealing the UK top spot and landing in the Billboard Top 10.

By early 1987 he was flying, duetting with Aretha Franklin on the Grammy-winning *I Knew You Were Waiting (For Me)*, and by the close of that year his debut solo album *Faith* had made No.1 in the UK and US, cementing his place as a giant of UK pop.

1986

CLASSIC POP PRESENTS

1986

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Robert Smith, goth's first pop star